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MA Thesis

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**Framing Brexit: A Comparative Study on Agenda and Frame Building in  
Coverage of the United Kingdom's EU Referendum**

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I have written this Master's thesis independently. All viewpoints of other authors, literary sources and data from elsewhere used for writing this paper have been referenced.

  
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# **FRAMING BREXIT: A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON AGENDA AND FRAME BUILDING IN COVERAGE OF THE UNITED KINGDOM'S EU REFERENDUM**

Daniel Green

## **Abstract**

The ways in which voters in democratic societies receive the information from which they base their political decision making has evolved along with technology. As radio accompanied print media in the 1920s, so too has television and the new media of the internet age. As the abundance and ubiquity of news media has increased, correspondingly has the informative role of media in the democratic process. The agenda setting theory of mass media has long proven that the issues highlighted in the media's agenda are subsequently highlighted in the public agenda and shape political debate. Additionally, framing theory suggests that the way the media describes an issue influences public perception of that issue. Recent concerns over "fake news," information warfare, and hostile narratives have pushed the issue of media content to the forefront of debate balancing democratic threats with the freedom of expression.

Provided the importance of media content, this research set out to determine what influences the construction of agendas and frames, and specifically, given the emergence and proliferation of what I have termed "expeditionary" media organizations, that is media organizations funded by a government for production and consumption in a foreign market, what affect funding model has on content production. To determine this, the coverage of three British media organizations with varying funding models: Sky News, a typical commercial news organization; the BBC, a public service broadcaster; and RT UK, a Russian state funded expeditionary media organization, were analyzed over the course of the UK's referendum campaign regarding EU membership. For three distinct one-week periods, February 21-27, April 17-23, and June 19-25, 2016, all of the campaign coverage from the native websites of

all three organizations was analyzed and coded to determine which issues comprised the greatest proportion of the agenda. Additionally, each issue was analyzed for tone to determine how various issues were framed.

Utilizing this data I was able to determine that the core agenda of all three media organizations consisted of the same eight issues: economy, horserace, coalition building, migration, sovereignty, EU reform, trade, and security. Only those issues comprising less than 3% of coverage saw much difference depending upon funding model. This lesser agenda does nonetheless suggest some influence by the various funding models. Frame building, however, exhibited a strong diversity between the three organizations. There was no discernable pattern of individual issues similarly framed by all three organizations. The BBC's coverage remained relatively neutral, with a small range of tone, while Sky News created content that was slightly negative, with a much larger range of tone, and RT UK's coverage was very negative with the greatest range of tone, suggesting that the funding model plays an important role in how issues are portrayed in the media.

These results suggest that different funding models may not have much influence on which issues the media highlights, but it does have a strong influence on how the media presents those issues. This could be important to future media regulators and legislators in order to develop policy that promotes a quality pluralistic media environment, to consider the funding model of various media organizations in addition to ownership. Additionally, this research demonstrates that the social environment where the content is produced is very influential on agenda building. This opens the door to determine how different expeditionary media organizations construct agendas and frames, whether content funded by the same government, but produced in different target markets shows any commonality, and whether expeditionary media content shares any similarity with content produced in the organization's funding country.

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## Introduction

The news media plays a key role in liberal democratic societies. It has long been argued that the Fourth Estate is responsible for facilitating the political discourse necessary for citizens to engage meaningfully with their government (Esipisu & Khaguli, 2009). In today's societies, voters heavily rely on the news media for the information needed to make political decisions and subsequently vote. Free and fair elections would be considerably more difficult without the information provided by the media. News media also serve as watchdogs, fostering trust among voters and political elites by holding those elites accountable (Chan & Suen 2009).

While the informative role of media has existed for years, the dissemination and consumption of news media has changed dramatically since the advent of the internet age. In the 1990s researchers postulated the "CNN effect" while attempting to determine the importance of 24-hour news broadcasts on foreign policy (Gilboa, 2005); after the explosion of social media came the "al Jazeera effect," which attempted to explain the importance of new media such as Facebook and Twitter on geopolitics (Seib, 2012). Given the ease of access to media in the internet era, as well as the influence of news media on public opinion, it is unsurprising that in the era of 24/7 news coverage nation states would invest in their own media outlets to be disseminated in foreign markets. By 2017 the amalgam of these state-financed media outlets broadcasting in foreign media systems include: the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) World Service, funded by the British government; Deutsche Welle, funded by the German government; RT, funded by the Russian government; France24, which began as a public-private partnership between the French government's holding company, France Medias Monde, and the private media company, Groupe TF1, but was wholly owned by France Medias Monde as of 2008; NHK World, the broadcaster of the Japanese government; CCTV, the Chinese state broadcaster; Al Jazeera, funded by the Qatari royal family; TRT, the public broadcaster of the state of Turkey; and others. These new types of media organizations which are funded by states, and are not intended for domestic audiences, but instead are exported to foreign markets, are relative newcomers to the global media stage, and as such there is no term for exactly

what these organizations are. For the sake of clarity throughout this study, I refer to these types of content producers as “expeditionary” media organizations.

Since its inception in 2005, the Russian State-funded news broadcaster RT has expanded into English speaking markets. In 2014, RT launched a dedicated British channel in London called RT UK, which some estimates believe has become the third most widely viewed 24-hour news channel in the United Kingdom (UK) (Pomerantsev, 2015). Many Russian foreign policy scholars note this as a deliberate policy move by the Russian government (Giles, 2016; Thornton, 2015). Western leaders have taken a concerned view of Russian media, going so far as to develop numerous entities, such as NATO’s Strategic Communication Center of Excellence, and the EU’s Strategic Communication Task Force within the European External Action Service, in part to discredit the Russian narrative produced by RT. However, there is little agreement on what effect Russian media sources such as RT and Sputnik have on English-speaking audiences. While some Russian foreign policy experts argue that these media sources serve to propagate the Russian view of events, others argue that these outlets are designed to create so much informational “noise” that audiences are unable to discern objective reporting from more subjective reporting or even outright disinformation (Giles, 2016). Perhaps the most visible accusation levied against RT from western governments, came from the US Office of the Director of National Intelligence (DNI) in the aftermath of the 2016 US presidential election. The unclassified DNI report, “Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections” attempted to elucidate the role of the Russian state in the 2016 US presidential election. This report concluded that RT served as a prominent platform for Kremlin messaging, referencing RT in over half of the report, citing the close collaboration between RT and WikiLeaks, and the biased coverage of the two candidates, which described Donald Trump as a victim of unfair coverage, while describing Hillary Clinton as having poor health and close ties to Islamic extremism (2017).

RT is also often the subject of stories by other media organizations. In this context, various branches of RT are regularly reported as being Russian propaganda, or a tool of the Russian President Vladimir Putin. According to NBC news in the US, “the U.S. considers RT, which is state-sponsored, to be a propaganda outlet.” (Dilanian & Hunt, 2017). In its January 2017 issue, *The Economist* described RT as “the Kremlin-

financed media weapon.” In March 2017 The New York Times published a story aimed at describing the news organization, including repeated assertions from management in RT that it was just another international news organization, while also stating that some believe “RT and Sputnik are simply tools of a sophisticated Russian propaganda machine, created by the Kremlin to push its foreign policy, defend its aggression in Ukraine and undermine confidence in democracy, NATO and the world as we have known it.” (Erlanger, 2017). The coverage of RT in popular media often connects Russian state operational funding with the organization serving as a mouthpiece of propaganda.

For all the concerns about RT’s content, there is little that media regulators can do to mediate its messaging. Regardless of the direct operational funding RT receives, and the opaque government ties, on paper most of RT’s bureaus are under the managerial control of independent non-governmental organizations. RT’s structure and ostensible independence provide a strong protection from the organization’s critics.

Despite the concerns from western governments, and discussions in popular media, the content of RT’s reporting has been the subject of very little academic investigations (Yablokov, 2015). Additionally, given the huge investment from the Russian government into this media outlet, little research has been conducted to understand what type of media actor RT is. RT is often either lumped together with commercial news media producers as just another international news producer or decried as propaganda. This thesis began with that general research aim in mind; given the accusations by many that RT was propaganda, despite the assertions from within that the organization was just another international news producer, and the prevalence of RT in foreign markets, I aim to better understand how RT’s content compared to other media organizations. Given that the primary differences between RT and other news producers is the source of funding, I want to discover how different funding models influences the news production process of a media organization.

The differences in news media content are particularly critical in the field of political communications. Political communications regard how politicians transmit their political messages (Foster, 2010). In the field of political communication, much of the research on media today differentiates between broad types of media; newsprint, television broadcasts, radio broadcasts, and the new media of the internet age. Yet, little



differentiation has been made within each category. This is somewhat problematic as the definite lines separating broad media types are blurring with the ease of content producer to incorporate different mediums through the internet. For example, The New York Times, a prominent American broadsheet newspaper, has an active YouTube channel where self-produced news videos are available. Additionally, many traditional television news outlets, such as CNN, Al Jazeera, and BBC News, now publish written news stories on their websites. That being said, the literature regarding broadcast news organizations has a well-developed differentiation between public service broadcasters, that is, broadcasters, usually owned and operated by domestic governments, to provide their public with unbiased, quality information in order to become more civically aware and subsequently better participants in the democratic process (Hendy, 2013), and commercial broadcasters, which are privately owned and are primarily concerned with generating profit (Newton, 2016), the fundamental difference between the two being operational funding.

This research relies on the political communication theories of agenda setting, framing and the hierarchy of influences theory. Considerable work has been conducted demonstrating that the issues highlighted in the media's agenda are repeated in the public agenda. This is best summed up with Bernard Cohen's (1963) thesis that the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (p.13). In addition to this, there is substantial literature regarding the importance of how issues are reported in the news media, known as "framing." The work on framing theory has demonstrated that the descriptions of issues used by the media influence how the public thinks about the same issues (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Since the content of the news media's message is important in influencing public opinion, later research attempted to understand what influences news media organizations to produce the content that they ultimately publish. This research was used in the construction of Shoemaker & Reese's hierarchy of influences theory, which states that media content is influenced by a range of variables from the routines of individual journalists, to the society in which the content is produced in (2014) and included among this theory's enumerated levels of analysis is the organization in which the content is produced.

The British referendum to leave the European Union (EU), commonly referred to as Brexit, is an ideal campaign through which to understand media effects because of the nature of referendum campaigns. Referendum campaigns are rarely based on a single issue, but instead are the result of myriad different policies and positions (Vreese & Semetko, 2004). This is clearly the case in the Brexit referendum with policies as diverse as immigration, public health, foreign policy, education, as well as many others all contributing to the referendum debate. Furthermore, referendum campaigns offer a unique opportunity to study political communication because there is no unified message coming from political actors. Unlike a traditional campaign, there are rarely clear partisan politics involved in referendum campaigns, and certainly not the same party hierarchies and candidates which can produce a coherent political message, as abundantly evident in the Brexit campaign which had over 40 recognized remain groups, and 8 different leave groups. With no unified message coming from the political elite, and so many diverse issues reduced to a simple yes/no vote, media effects are amplified in referendum campaigns and have considerable autonomy in constructing the agenda and how those issues are framed in the campaign.

Even in an increasingly globalized world, the nation state is still the primary structure in studying political communication. In addition to providing a valuable natural experiment through the Brexit campaign, the media system of the UK offers a notable context for comparative study. The UK is perhaps the archetype of the public service core style of media system, with a quality and trusted national news producer in the BBC. Despite the dominance of the BBC, the UK was one of the earliest European nations to allow private, commercial broadcasters (Curran, Iyengar, Brink Lund, & Salovaara-Moring, 2009). This being the case, the UK media system provides a quality location to study media effects as it has a well-developed, and well-researched system of both public service and commercial broadcasters with which to compare RT UK's content.

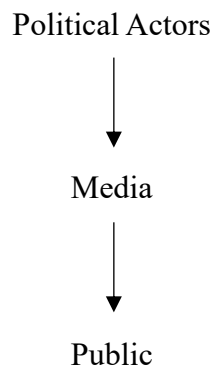
This environment offers a unique opportunity in which to examine how different funding models influence the content of various media outlets. Specifically, whether Russian state funding influences the content of RT UK's reporting of the Brexit campaign as compared to the BBC's public service broadcasting model, with funding originating from the viewers themselves through the payment of license fees, and Sky

News's corporate model, with funding coming from the profits earned by the organization. Using the Brexit campaign as the context offers valuable insight into RT UK as a media actor, given the unique situation of having a referendum campaign with profound implications in a country with a strong and well-researched history of both public service and commercial broadcasting with which to compare. This led me to the specific research question: "Do different funding models influence agenda building and frame building in different news organizations?"

To determine if the organizational variable of funding models influenced agenda building and frame building, I undertook quantitative and qualitative content analysis of all stories produced by the three media organizations; The BBC, Sky News, and RT UK, throughout three distinct one-week periods during the Brexit campaign. The content was analyzed to determine which issues were given the most salience by each organization, and the tone associated with each issue by the various organizations. Using this data I was able to determine that while the exact emphasis placed on issues varied among the organizations, the same eight issues were central to agenda building of all three organizations. Frame building, however varied considerably between the three organizations, leading me to conclude that funding models have a strong influence on frame building, while agenda building is likely to be more strongly influenced by higher order variables.

## Background

Political communication is inherently an interdisciplinary study bringing together the fields of political science, communication studies, sociology, journalism, psychology, and others. As such it has eluded any easy definition, with researchers from each facet of political communication projecting their own nuanced understandings on the field. At the core of political communication is Lasswell's model of communication, "Who says what in which channel to whom, with what effect?" (1948), provided the message is political. For many contemporary critics of Lasswell's model, these early understandings of political communication were very unidirectional; focused on a top down understanding of political messaging, with political actors formulating a message which would then be communicated to the professional media who would interpret this message and distribute it to the public, as modeled in *Figure 1*.



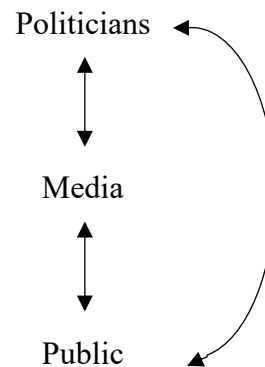
*Figure 1. Traditional Model of Political Communication*

A more contemporary understanding of political communication research includes more dialogue, and at every level. A definition that is widely accepted comes from Pippa Norris (2004, p. 1).

*Political communications is an interactive process concerning the transmission of information among politicians, the news media and the public. The process operates down-wards from governing institutions towards citizens, horizontally in*

*linkages among political actors, and also upwards from public opinion towards authorities.*

This is essentially something more akin to *Figure 2*.



*Figure 2. Contemporary Model of Political Communication*

Norris continues to describe political communication literature as falling into three distinct categories, often depending upon where in this communicative hierarchy they reside: production, contents, and effects. Production process literature looks at the top of the hierarchy and focuses on how political messages are produced by political actors such as politicians, political parties, interest groups, etc., and often focuses on the rise of professional political communication consultants (Scammell, 2016; Moloney, Richards, Scullion & Daymon, 2003). Political communication content literature aims to understand contents of the messages produced; this research usually focuses on the central pillar of the hierarchy and looks at the substance of the message, such as the tone and volume of reporting from a given source. Media effects literature is the largest body of work in political communications research (Semetko & Scammell 2012) and aims to understand how individuals are influenced by political communications. Since media production literature focuses on the actions of the political class it is outside of the scope of this thesis, not to mention that the type of message production in referendum campaigns is not the same as exists in other political communications. However, literature regarding political communication contents and media effects is paramount in

understanding possible organizational variables influencing the coverage of the Brexit referendum.

## **Media Effects**

People have been conceptualizing the effects of mass media on the public since the early twentieth century. One only needs to look at Orson Welles' "War of the Worlds" broadcast in order to see how public interest can be shaped by media. The ideas behind media manipulation have changed and grown along with the methods that we use to consume media. Regardless of how it is packaged, it is difficult to deny that media consumption influences the public, and it has also been difficult to describe exactly how we are affected.

The first significant academic research into mass media effects came from studying propaganda from the first World War. Important among the early academic writing on propaganda was Harold Lasswell's 1927 work, *The Theory of Political Propaganda*. Lasswell emphasized the alteration of collective attitudes, and was particularly adamant that propaganda was categorically different from education, specifically regarding its result. Education, as Lasswell understood it, utilized the scientific method and was open to whatever results an academic endeavor arrived at; propaganda, however, was only concerned with a specific result and therefore would manipulate the process to get the desired result. Of particular interest to a contemporary reader of Lasswell's work are his claims that the public of the early twentieth century were becoming more susceptible to propaganda because rapid technological change was responsible for increased social disorganization, a claim that feels at home in contemporary "New Media" research.

Possibly the most influential event on the progression of research on media effects was the Lippmann-Dewey debate which also arose in the early twentieth century. Walter Lippmann, in his 1922 book, *Public Opinion*, argued that the public is only capable of synthesizing information very superficially, and additionally are not capable of behaving rationally. Lippmann argued that given an individual's limited life experience in the broader picture of world affairs, the public relies entirely on mass media to explain the complexities of the world. Lippmann further argued that the messaging of mass media is inherently flawed by the limitations of communication and concluded that because of this, citizens were unable to contribute meaningfully to democracies.

Lippmann ultimately concluded that democracy is simply untenable and that the public needs the control of an enlightened elite (Diggs-Brown, 2011).

John Dewey engaged in debate with Lippmann, beginning with the publishing of his own book entitled *The Public and Its Problems* in 1927. Dewey countered Lippmann's argument, claiming that while the public's understanding of political communications was inelegant, they were ultimately capable of understanding and subsequently making informed decisions. Dewey claimed that more resources were required in order to foster conditions to improve open debate in society. Once open and transparent debate existed throughout a society, Dewey argued, societies would naturally come to and implement the best possible policies for their own development. In his 1938 work, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, Dewey builds on his ideas of mass media, stating that only logic and strict adherence to the scientific method and reasoning should be used by the media in addressing policy and social concerns.

Throughout the Second World War research on media effects was again consumed by interest in propaganda. In 1948, Leonard Doob, a former propagandist himself, published his work, *Public Opinion and Propaganda*. Doob's work was some of the earliest to incorporate psychology into the study of propaganda. He differentiates between different types of media: print, radio, and motion pictures, arguing that the modes of communication selected impacted public comprehension. Most importantly, Doob's influential work demonstrated a mechanism, in the form of stimulus-response, for the ability of mass media to shape public opinion.

Doob's work paved the way for the next generation of studies on mass media effects, marked by the belief that mass media is all-powerful in shaping public understanding. This generation of understanding is best exemplified by the "magic bullet" or "hypodermic needle" theory, which postulates that all humans are driven by base psychological desires and mass media can easily manipulate public opinion by simply targeting these base needs or desires. This idea does not seem to be attributable to any individual nor based on any empirical research, and instead relied on observations regarding Nazi propaganda (Moy & Bosch, 2013). After being universally disproved, most researchers appear to have distanced themselves from any mention of the magic bullet theory.

As early as the late 1940's, researchers were discovering more theoretically- and methodologically-sound models of mass media effects. Chief among these researchers was Paul Lazarsfeld at Columbia University. Lazarsfeld's work heavily contributed to the "two-step flow" theory of communication (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). This work proposed that the public as an entity was not as susceptible to media effects as previously believed. Instead, Lazarsfeld suggested that individuals are more heavily influenced by important public figures who he termed opinion leaders. Lazarsfeld's "Two-step flow" was further developed in his seminal work, *Personal Influence*, which demonstrated that consumers were more likely to be persuaded to purchase a good based on personal recommendation than on advertisements alone (Simonson, 2006). Media was therefore shown to influence individuals by influencing these opinion leaders that the people looked to.

Another important researcher at this time who collaborated with Paul Lazarsfeld was Bernard Berelson. Berelson's important contribution to this field was his 1954 work, *Voting: A Study of Opinion Formation in a Presidential Campaign*. Berelson studied the 1948 presidential election in Elmira, New York in the United States and concluded that not only were individuals influenced by opinion makers, but their social system heavily influenced which opinion makers they were more influenced by. Berelson's important contribution to political communication research more broadly was demonstrating the importance of sociology on the field, and along with Lazarsfeld demonstrated that media effects were much more complicated than previously believed and contingent upon a multitude of variables.

The next major breakthrough in our understanding of media effects arose from McCombs and Shaw's 1972 work, *The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media*. In this study the authors determined that in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, voters considered those issues that were most widely covered by the press to be the most important issues in the campaign. McCombs and Shaw's theory has been repeatedly tested (Gans, 1979; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) and has, to date, not been fundamentally challenged. Agenda setting is among the most widely published on aspect of media effects research, and has matured to include ideas on content placement in media presentation as well as repetition of content (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). The most contemporary research on agenda setting attempts to understand the agenda setting of new media, which



includes online media, social media, and other digital communications (Boynton & Richardson, 2016).

Demonstrating the interdisciplinary nature of political communication research, the next major breakthroughs in media effects literature came from advancements in the study of cognitive psychology. In the early 1990's, researchers determined that people are more likely to utilize recently encountered ideas than more temporally distantly encountered ideas (Tulving & Schacter, 1990). Media researchers were quick to apply this new discovery, which they dubbed "priming" in the field of political communications. The basic premise of priming research contends that when a media actor presents a topic, that topic is brought to the forefront of an individual's cognition and will be more readily recalled and utilized in decision making (Hastie & Park, 1986). Since most of the public is not keenly aware of every issue in a political contest, the media can highlight those issues upon which political decisions will be made.

The final influential concept in this field, which also originated in psychology, is framing. According to Robert Entman in his 1993 work, *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm*, frames highlight the most salient pieces of information in a message. Unlike agenda setting and priming, framing operates from the assumption that the way in which a message is presented can have an effect on the audience. Mass media is able to accentuate which aspects of a message are the most important, and thereby determine how their audience thinks about a given topic.

The biggest issue in media effects research currently is the effect of widespread internet usage on political communications. Numerous researchers are attempting to determine whether the theories developed in a time of newspapers and broadcast television are still valid in the internet era. Much work is also currently underway to understand what influence social media has on media effects, specifically given the numerous personal blogs and outlets which have somewhat eroded the clear distinctions between political actors, the media, and the public that were conceptualized in a pre-internet era and now give politicians direct lines to the public.

## **Media Content**

Given the immense interest in media effects research and proven influence that media content has on public opinion, it is surprising that fewer researchers have been

interested in how the news media is created. Media effects would not be possible without media content and, as such, the two are intrinsically tied. While some anecdotal evidence exists of media content analysis by the Catholic Church as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, contemporary media content analysis traces its genesis to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Early media content studies originated in the United States concurrently with a marked increase in newsprint production; these analyses were themselves printed in editorial sections of newspapers and often attempted to understand the “Yellow Journalism” phenomenon of the time (Rodgers, 2007). These studies relied on simple metrics such as measuring the block of text associated with a given story and lacked the academic rigor that would come later (Krippendorff, 2004).

The 1930s and 1940s saw the first major academic breakthroughs regarding the study of media content. As public opinion research became more widespread, exemplified by Walter Lippmann’s *Public Opinion*, researchers began to compare media content and public opinion. Chief among these early researchers who brought actual academic merit to the study of media content was Julian Woodward, who in 1933 published the first meaningful consideration of methodology regarding content analysis. Woodward regarded “securing of meaningful, and at the same time stable, categories of classification” (p.530) as the most important problem facing meaningful quantitative newspaper analysis, but also considered the development of a sampling technique and what quantitative unit to use when reporting findings.

Demonstrating the multidisciplinary nature of political communication studies, the next major advances in media content research arrived from the study of psychology. First, Allport and Faden’s 1940 publication, *The Psychology of Newspapers: Five Tentative Laws*, built upon psychological experiments in rumor dissemination to demonstrate how information changed as it was transmitted from a political actor through media institutions and to the citizen audience. Additional research of particular importance to the field of media content studies developed at this time in concert with the psychological concept of “attitude.” “Attitude” is the positive or negative evaluation that individuals confer to any given object (Chisman, 1976). While utilizing the concept of “attitude,” Janis and Fadner published *A coefficient of imbalance for content analysis* (1943). This publication gave media content researchers

a tool to understand and quantify bias in the media and led to improved journalistic standards.

In the late 1940's Paul Lazarsfeld and Bernard Berelson coined the term "content analysis." In their 1948 work *The Analysis of Communication Content*, the two authors concisely presented the methodology and concepts around the growing field of content analysis in communication studies. This work was later incorporated by Berelson in his book, *Content Analysis in Communication Research* (1952). This was the first textbook on media content and added considerable legitimacy to the study of media content by consolidating all of the knowledge on media content analysis at the time and concisely conceptualizing content analysis as a methodology.

While the focus on content analysis did much to further the field of media content studies, simply quantifying the content of various news media did little to help understand why certain stories are published while others are not. The first conceptualization of this type arose from German-American psychologist Kurt Lewin. Lewin (1947) developed gatekeeping as a model to explain how information is transmitted. His research focused on food habits, in which he demonstrated that information on food selection moves stage by stage through channels and at each stage the information goes through a "gate," where it either progresses to the next stage or is discarded based upon various psychological forces. Lewin determined that various channels can lead to the same result and that different actors serve as "gatekeepers."

Soon after publication, Lewin's gatekeeping model was used in the context of news production. David White (1950) first applied Lewin's model to better understand a singular "gate" in the news production of a mid-sized American newspaper. White studied the wire-editor, an individual responsible for determining which stories from several wire services would ultimately end up on the front page of the newspaper. White determined that gatekeeping was ultimately based upon highly subjective personal reasons stating, "through studying his overt reasons for rejecting news stories from the press associations we see how highly subjective, how based on the 'gate keeper's' own set of experiences, attitudes and expectations the communication of 'news' really is" (p.390).

In the years since White's study, gatekeeping theory has developed into a well-established media content theory; however, just as with media effects research, the

advent of the internet has called into question many of the assumptions initially proposed in a world dominated by print media, television, and radio. These “old media” relied on expensive infrastructure and institutions to convey information, limiting the avenues for dissemination of information. The internet has greatly reduced the cost of message transmission and, as such, the volume of information has increased (Bastos, Raimundo, & Travitzki, 2013). New media was thought to herald the end of gatekeeping, as the decreased production costs and increased availability were believed to end news media creators’ hegemony over media content. However, recent research demonstrates that information is still moderated through gatekeepers; they have just taken a different form and their influence is less pronounced than in prior media environments (Schwalbe, Silcock, & Candello, 2015).

The advent of computers has also influenced the way in which media content studies are performed. Computers allowed content researchers to categorize considerably larger amounts of texts and to do it much more quickly. The most influential early work on computerized content analysis was *The General Inquirer: A Computer Approach to Content Analysis* (Stone, Dunphy, & Smith, 1966). This work laid out how computerized content analysis could be used across a variety of fields, including political science, psychology, and advertising. Unlike previous advances in the field of media content studies, computerized content analysis did not change how media content was conceptualized; it simply added an improved methodology to existing theories.

Another important theoretical advancement in media content studies was the advent of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Unlike traditional media content studies, CDA researchers draw on linguistic and social theory to determine the power relations in discourse. Instead of simply attempting to determine how certain phenomena are represented, CDA has dealt heavily with power relations, which is of particular interest to political communication research (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). Most credit Norman Fairclough’s 1989 work *Language and Power* to be the genesis of CDA.

When faced with so few theories through which to understand media content production, Pamela Shoemaker and Stephen Reese set out to develop a better theoretical framework. Their work culminated in the 1996 book *Mediating the Message*, wherein they compile the scattered studies, such as White’s gatekeeper study, into a larger

coherent understanding of which variables influence media content. In this work they lay out the Hierarchy of Influences Model, which is rooted in social constructivism and describes five layers of influences on media content. These layers, from micro to macro, are: individuals, routines, organizations, social institutions, and social systems. Shoemaker and Reese argue that no single layer is isolated and they all influence one another, as well as media content.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### **Agenda Setting Theory**

The best way in which a democracy works as idealized is when all voting citizens interact with information about the candidates and issues about which they are voting (Milner, 2002). Without an informed electorate casting votes in accordance with their own interests and values, representative democracies would only serve random chance, and not the interests of the public. In sufficiently small groups, the electorate might be able to receive all the information necessary to make a decision directly from individual political actors. It is easy to imagine that in a mayoral election in a town of 200 individuals, every voter would be able to receive enough information directly from the candidates themselves in order to make an informed decision. However, there is certainly a limit to the amount of engagement that individual politicians or parties can have; it is difficult to imagine that a candidate running for the President of France would be able to personally communicate with every French voter. Since it would be seemingly impossible for every member of the electorate to personally engage with every politician running for office, voters are reliant on other sources for information on which to base their political decision making. While social media is becoming an increasingly important source for political communication (Patrut, Patrut, & SpringerLink, 2014), the majority of voters still receive the information on which they base political decisions from traditional news media sources (European Commission, 2015).

Since news media occupies such a prominent position in the democratic process, it is important to understand how news reports are constructed. In a perfect democratic model, the news would produce unbiased and objective reports of political issues and the political elite from which public debate could ultimately determine the best possible outcomes (Clawson & Oxley, 2013). Many journalists would argue that this is exactly what they do, that they report objective truths, and since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, professional journalism has maintained that the theory of objectivity is essential to the field (Allan, 2010). Despite this core tenant of professional journalism, it is not difficult to see the myriad interpretations surrounding any given phenomenon. Chan (2015) demonstrated in the case of the Umbrella Movement of Hong Kong that various media organizations produced increasingly different headlines including, "Tear gas fired as thousands join

Occupy,” “Fearless to suppression, 60,000 people occupied Central and called for Leung to step down,” and “Hong Kong Cries” (p. 423) to describe a singular phenomenon. Likewise, Schultz, Kleinnijenhuis, Oegema, Utz, & van Atteveldt (2012) showcased considerable discrepancies in coverage of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill between US and UK news media. According to their study, US media reported on the role of the US president in 56% of newspaper coverage, while only 37% of British stories reported on the US presidency. In addition, the UK media reported on the exact cause of the spill in only 4% of its coverage, while the US media reported on the cause in 12% of its coverage (p. 102). Both cases demonstrate instances wherein various media actors were confronted with a single phenomenon, and ultimately produced varied news reports. If all news reporters were simply conveying completely objective realities, there would be no discrepancies in reports. This reveals a fundamental concept in agenda-setting theory; in order to convey information about a complex and multifaceted issue, media actors must decide which aspects of the issue to highlight and communicate and, in doing so, construct reality regarding that issue. While these different interpretations may be all based on objective observations of the exact same events, diverse journalists create discrete realities by reaching different conclusions.

Given the public’s reliance on the news media for information regarding political decisions, and the understanding that news media organizations create realities through their reporting, it is easy to conclude that the media is essentially omnipotent in its ability to influence public opinion. However, this is clearly not the case as the magic bullet theory has been disproved time and again (see: Baines, et al, 2010; Neuman, & Guggenheim, 2011; Robertson, 2014). An individual is inherently limited in their interactions with the world, as no single person can experience everything, however, this does not mean that individuals do not rely on any personal experience when forming opinions from media observations (Soroka, Maioni, & Martin, 2013). An analogy to Plato’s allegory of the cave in his work *Republic* is often used to better understand this concept. Plato proposes that individuals have been imprisoned from birth in a cave with their necks chained such that they can only see the surface of the cave in front of themselves. Behind the prisoners is a wall, and behind the wall a fire is burning. From their position, the prisoners are unable to see any object moving behind them, only the shadow of objects as they are projected onto the cave’s surface in front

of them. When the prisoners only see shadows, they perceive these shadows as the entire reality, as they are unable to perceive the physical items that are casting the shadows and are therefore limited in their understanding of their world. When the prisoners are subsequently unchained and able to move their heads, they are able to perceive a new reality wherein the shadows are simply an aspect of a much more complex object (Plato & Halliwell, 1993). So, the analogy as such, is that the public is constrained by their limited life experience and cannot fully understand the political realities of the political elites. Certainly, they have some understanding of political decisions, as they can see the tangible results of those decisions in their daily lives. However, not every policy decision will directly influence every single citizen's life, and so the public would largely remain ignorant of most political actions. The news media therefore often serves to describe those phenomena to the public through their own constructed realities. In consuming these reports, the public is forced to compare the media's constructed reality to their existing understanding of phenomena. To understand those gaps in their knowledge, people seek out information and then compare that information with their already existing understandings (Norris, 2012).

Those assumptions led to the beginning of the agenda-setting theory of mass media. Early research in agenda-setting aimed to describe the news media's ability to influence the salience placed on issues by the public (McCombs and Reynolds, 2002). Agenda setting was first hypothesized by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw's landmark 1972 work *The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media*. McCombs and Shaw demonstrated that five issues: foreign policy, law and order, fiscal policy, public welfare, and civil rights, dominated the media agenda in Chapel Hill, North Carolina in the United States during the 1968 presidential campaign (p. 179). The authors went on to demonstrate a nearly perfect correlation between the importance placed on each issue by undecided Chapel Hill voters and the amount of coverage of each issue, as well as the prominence of each issue in the news media (p. 180-181). Simply stated, the more an issue was reported on and the more prominent the location of an issue within the medium (i.e. whether an issue occupies a front-page headline of a newspaper, or is only present in the text farther removed) the more important it was determined to be by voters in deciding which candidate to vote for. McCombs and Shaw's initial study also demonstrated the different salience placed on each of the five issues by different news



sources. Comparing the analyzed content of nine news media sources, the researchers demonstrated correlated coverage as low as 42% (p. 183), giving credence to the assumption that broadcasters shape political reality instead of simply presenting a single external reality.

McCombs and Shaw's early research seemed to prove Bernard Cohen's (1963) thesis that the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (p.13) and proved that the media agenda shapes the public agenda. The salience placed on objects by the media is subsequently repeated in the same proportion by the public. Since McCombs and Shaw's initial study into agenda setting, the theory has matured and developed considerably, though numerous empirical studies have proved this same premise: the salience placed upon an issue by the media subsequently leads the public to perceive these issues with equivalent salience because the news media do not reflect an objective reality, but instead filter and shape reality (see: Dunaway, Branton, & Abrajano, 2010; Liu, Lindquist, & Vedlitz, 2011; Hopmann, Elmelund-Præstekær, Albæk, Vliegenthart, & Vreese, 2012). While early agenda setting studies were predominately conducted in the United States, the theory has subsequently been tested in different cultural contexts and media systems (see: Landolt, Goldring, & Bernhard, 2011; Camaj, 2014; Walgrave, Soroka, & Nuytemans, 2008; Zhang, Shao, & Bowman, 2012). The agenda setting theory has also been tested repeatedly outside of strictly political communications research in varied fields including business communication (Meijer & Kleinnijenhuis, 2006) and advertising (Laxman & Krishnakumar, 2013).

It is important to understand, not only that agenda setting occurs, but also why agenda setting occurs. Not all information is pertinent to all audiences. For example, the Finnish Centre Party's platform on workers' rights is unlikely to be of importance to a voter in South Africa. This idea or relative importance of information to an individual is well encapsulated by the psychological concept: need for orientation. An individual's need for orientation is a result of their need to be familiar with their surroundings (Weaver, 1980). When dealing with a new uncertainty, as in an unknown candidate or complex political issue, individuals are more likely to seek out information on that uncertainty from the media, and the more need for orientation someone possesses, the greater they are influenced by media effects (Matthes, 2006). Need for orientation has

been demonstrated to be driven by two underlying causes: relevance and uncertainty (McCombs & Weaver, 1985). Relevance is the primary driver of the need for orientation. In the case of the South African voter, Finnish politics have very little relevance to her, and therefore her need for orientation would be lowered. However, for a Finnish business owner, the Centre Party's platform on workers' rights would have considerable relevance and therefore she would have a much greater need for orientation. The uncertainty of a political outcome also drives the public's need for orientation. If an issue is perceived as a "sure thing," such as when a well-liked incumbent candidate is campaigning against a newcomer, then the uncertainty of the election will be diminished in the public's opinion. When the uncertainty lessens the need for orientation will also subsequently lessen, and therefore media effects will be diminished (McCombs, 2014).

### **Framing Theory**

While object salience has been well defined in agenda setting research, simply reporting on an object will shift public attention to that object, and the greater the public's need for orientation, the more likely the public is to seek out information from the mass media, thereby increasing agenda setting effects. As the agenda setting theory has developed, it has become clear that not only what the media reports influences the public agenda, what McCombs calls "object salience," but also how the media reports on that issue, or "attribute salience" (2014). McCombs has argued that framing theory is not independent from agenda setting, but is, instead an extension of agenda-setting theory and should be considered as "second-tier" agenda-setting, stating, "framing is the selection of a restricted number of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed" (1997, p. 37). As such, this understanding of attribute-salience as second level agenda-setting intrinsically links framing with agenda setting, as the only concern is the way in which those objects that define the media agenda are described. This view focuses on the tone in which objects are described: positive, negative or neutral.

Others argue that framing goes beyond second-level agenda-setting. Robert Entman first attempted to conceptualize a coherent theory in political communications research in his 1993 work, *Framing: toward clarification of a fractured paradigm*,

wherein he described, “to frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described” (p. 52, emphasis in original). If the news media shapes political reality, the frame is that shape. According to Entman, frames highlight specific information regarding issues thereby lending more salience to those aspects than to other aspects of the same issue. In defining framing in such a broad way, there are nearly infinite ways in which the term can be conceptualized. Druckman (2001) notes seven different definitions of frames and framing including “structured understandings of the way aspects of the world function” (Goffman, 1974, Fillmore, 1985), “the way the story is written or produced” (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997, p. 39), and “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation composed of little tacit theories about what exists, what happens, and what matters” (Gitlin, 1980, p. 6). Cacciatore, Scheufele, & Iyengar (2016) have posited that due to this overabundance of conceptualizations of framing, the term has come to incorporate several different distinct and separate phenomena.

To clear up some of the ambiguity of framing as a concept, for the sake of this research, framing is understood as the salience placed on the attributes of those issues present in the media agenda. In analyzing frame building, it will be necessary to determine the emotive language used by the news creators in describing the issues that constitute the media agenda.

### **Hierarchy of Influences Model**

Since media frames and agendas have been proven to be influential on public opinion, it is important to understand what influences the creation of frames and agendas in the news media. There is certainly no single variable that is responsible for the structuring of media content, but instead McCombs (2014) uses the analogy of “peeling an onion.” Media content is influenced by a number of different forces, which can be analyzed from the micro, the nature of the journalists writing the piece, to the macro, entire social systems. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) have identified at least five factors that can contribute to frame building from the micro to macro level: the

ideological or political orientations of journalists, journalistic routines, organizational pressures and constraints, social institutions, and social systems as a whole.

The individual journalists who create the stories which are eventually published can influence the content of news media. Despite professional standards and journalists' pronouncements to the contrary, the individual ideologies of media creators influence content (Watson, 2014). In addition to ideologies, many demographic traits influence how an individual interprets a phenomenon and subsequently how they describe that phenomenon to their audience. Studies have concluded that the ethnicity (Van Sterkenburg, Knoppers, & De Leeuw, 2010), gender (Bruin & Ross, 2004), and sexual orientation (Aarons, 1991) of individual journalists all influence media content.

The next layer of analysis as proposed by Shoemaker and Reese is that of routines. Routines are understood as the rules which guide individual media producers. These rules, which are often unwritten, are a result of constraints placed upon media producers by their audience, the source of their information, and the organizations they produce media for. For example, considerable studies have been conducted into how time constraints when producing and distributing news influence the content. When given less time to produce a story, journalists utilize fewer sources, are more reliant on public relations outlets, conduct less crosschecking, and use more textual channels (Reich & Godler, 2014). Lindner (2009) demonstrates that journalists in Iraq during Operation Iraqi Freedom were constrained by the sources of their information and essentially sorted into three separate groups: those journalists who were embedded with American military units, those constrained to Baghdad, and those who were free to roam throughout the country. Lindner concluded that these different routines influenced the content of each type of journalist; embedded journalists reported more on the experiences of American soldiers, journalists in Baghdad reported more on the experiences of Iraqis, and the media content of the free roaming reporters was much more balanced.

The next layer, the organizational layer, is the primary concern of my research. Since news media is produced in a bureaucratic and organizational setting, the media organization certainly has the potential to influence content of the media which they produce. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) enumerate several variables at the organizational level which can influence media content including ownership, policies,

goals, actions, rules, membership, interactions with other organizations, bureaucratic structure, economic viability, and stability. Since all members of a media organizations ultimately answer to the person in charge, ownership is very influential in the formation of media content. Privately owned media organizations that are only beholden to a single owner have been shown to be more likely to create content that is in line with the owner's interests and report on issues that may be viewed as risky. Publicly traded media organizations, however, are ultimately beholden to their shareholders and as such are constrained to producing content which is less risky, reporting on issues which are believed to be profitable.

The level of social institutions aims to understand the wide variety of influences on media content that exist outside of media organizations. These external influences can range from government policy regarding the control of the media, public relations firms, and civil society organizations that the media uses as sources. This is best understood by conceptualizing journalism itself as an institution that is intertwined with many other institutions.

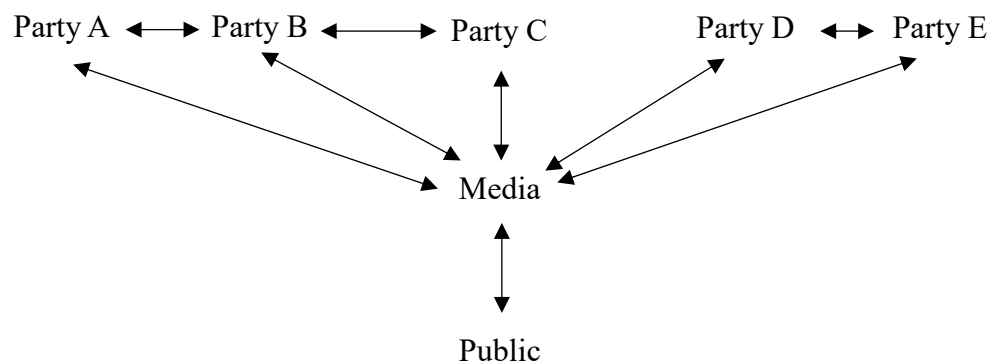
The most macro level layer of influence on media content is that of social systems. Social systems are the base from which all content is constructed. Social systems are often difficult to conceptualize, particularly due to their hegemonic nature, but are basically the sum total of relationships between people and their institutions. Media systems are often broken down at the nation-state level, as this has traditionally been an important division of media systems; however, with the increased interconnectedness of the internet age, it is not difficult to conceptualize a global social system.

### **Political Communication in Referendums**

The UK's referendum to leave the EU offers a unique opportunity to see how organizational variables influence media agenda and frame building. Unlike more traditional political communications, in referendum campaigns there is no clear messenger at the top of the hierarchy. When an individual politician is running for office he often has a clearly articulated platform on which he is running. The content of this message is benefitted by the party affiliation of the politician and, increasingly, by a cadre of professional communications staff. The media is then able to rely on the

communications and statements from the various individuals and camps competing for the office when constructing their coverage. The press then transfers the object salience from the communications of the political actors to the media (Hopmann et al, 2012). This traditional paradigm of political communications looks like the model presented in *Figure 2, p. 10*.

Referendum campaigns, however, bring together a host of diverse parties from civil society organizations, political parties, individual politicians and other organizations who otherwise might not cooperate. This disparate group rarely communicates their position as clearly as a traditional political party (Sherriff, 2015). In doing so, referendum campaigns lack exclusive candidates for debates and messaging, since individuals are not running as candidates being voted for (Wirth, et al, 2010). Additionally, referendum campaigns can fracture parties more often than traditional campaigns can. A model more analogous to this system is shown in *Figure 3*:



*Figure 3. Political Communication in a Referendum Campaign*

The Brexit campaign followed this more complicated model. In the 2015 general election, Prime Minister David Cameron's Conservative Party won a majority government for the first time since 1992 (Bale, 2011), and part of their campaigning had hinged upon a referendum on EU membership. The referendum itself was an attempt to deal with a rift that was building between the mainstream core and Eurosceptic factions within the party (Cowley & Kavanagh, 2016). The Conservatives were split over new Europhile policies that viewed the free movement of workers and capital as

tremendously beneficial to the UK's economy, while another faction of "old-guard" Eurosceptic conservatives were unwilling to concede sovereign control of immigration policy necessary for such policies to work (Glencross & SpringerLink, 2016). This schism within the party was also evident in the positions taken by influential Conservative politicians, with David Cameron and Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne supporting Remain while London's Mayor Boris Johnson and Justice Secretary Michael Gove eventually supporting Leave. Fractions within parties were not unique to the Conservative Party either; the official Labour Party position was "Labour In for Britain," yet leader Jeremy Corbyn was frequently derided by the party for not campaigning more vocally (Curtice, 2016). Furthermore, following the vote, it was shown that over 70% of Labour constituencies voted to leave (Hanretty, 2016).

The Remain and Leave camps eventually sorted into three broad campaign groups: Britain Stronger in Europe, Vote Leave, and Grassroots Out/Leave.EU. Britain Stronger in Europe brought together UK business interests, politicians from the Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat, and Green Parties. The Leave camp brought together politicians from United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), Conservatives, Labour, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), and the group Business for Britain (Vasilopoulou, 2016). In addition to the internal division and strange bedfellows from Britain's major political parties and business interests coalescing into the two camps, there were also pronouncements from civil society, the military, and foreign leaders as well.

Referendums reduce numerous policy problems into a single dichotomous choice, as was clearly the case in the Brexit campaign. The decision to leave the EU was not based upon a single policy issue, but instead incorporated a myriad of issues. EU membership impacts nearly every facet of policy making. The primary issues behind the Brexit debate, according to polling data, was the nexus between immigration, the economy, and sovereignty (Curtice, 2016). Many who wished to leave believed the free movement of people was responsible for lowering wages, that labor migrants from the EU were outcompeting British citizens for employment, and that the British government was powerless to do anything about this as long as they remained members of the EU. However the campaigns were not limited to these issues with debate incorporating such diverse issues as public health (see: Iacobucci, 2016), the

environment (see: Reid, 2016), and education (see: Matthews, 2016). In doing so many different political discourses can be utilized in the coverage of the referendum campaign.

The Brexit campaign incorporated a wide variety of issues communicated by a diversity of actors and groups, with both sides lacking a coherent communicative structure. Without a strong central communicative structure coming from campaigning parties, news producing organizations had more autonomy in their construction of agendas and frames. Because of this, the Brexit campaign offers an excellent opportunity to determine how organizational variables, specifically funding models, influence both agenda building and frame building in the coverage of this campaign.

### **The Media System of the UK**

It is important to determine, particularly given the nature of this research regarding an expeditionary media player, whether the conceptualization of a nation-state centric media system even remains valid in an increasingly globalized media environment. To date, many researchers have attempted to better conceptualize the space in which political communication occurs (see Chalaby, 2005; Napoli, 2011; Scolari, 2012) many claiming the advent of new media and increasingly globalized media has rendered the concept of national media systems obsolete. However, media systems conceptualized around the nation-state remain relevant to political communications research because the nation state is at the core of the political process, and thus the citizens of a nation state are ultimately the audience of any political communication.

Hallin and Mancini's seminal work *Comparing Media Systems: 3 Models of Media and Politics* (2004) revitalized the notion of media systems, the most macro layer in the hierarchy of influences model, in political communication research. This work attempted to categorize several western countries into 3 taxonomic categories based upon the development of media markets, political parallelism, the development of journalistic professionalism, and the extent and type of state intervention. The UK, along with the United States, Canada, and Ireland falls within the parameters of a Liberal or "Anglo-American" media system. This system is defined by a strong history of commercial press, with little state involvement. As most political communication



research has historically originated in the United States and the UK, this is the most widely studied and best understood media system (Hallin & Mancini, 2011). This stream of development led to considerable professionalism of journalism, and a strong tradition of “fact-centered” reporting.

This designation alone does little to understand why the media system in which a message is disseminated matters as Hallin and Mancini themselves point out “there are important differences between the four countries, enough that we should be careful about throwing around the notion of an “Anglo-American” media model too easily” (2004, p.246). The British media system offers a unique opportunity to look at organizational variables because it, not only possesses a strong, and open media society like other Anglo-American systems, it also has a unique combination of a robust public service broadcasting tradition, in addition to a long history of commercial news broadcasters.

At the advent of broadcast journalism, the UK invested heavily in the development of a strong public service broadcasting (Medhurst, 2003). Initially concerned about the national security implications of widespread public access to broadcasting technologies, the British government kept control of the technologies. From the Telegraphy Act of 1869, the Post Office was given the sole right to transmit telegraphs, which expanded in 1904 to encompass wireless telephony and ultimately all broadcasting. Following the First World War and under commercial pressure from radio manufacturers, the British government relaxed its stance on radio transmission solely in service to national security, and more and more British citizens were purchasing radio receivers for entertainment, which the Post Office continued to license. By 1923, the Postmaster General set out to review the finances of the state controlled broadcasters, and, led by Frederick Sykes determined that broadcasting was hugely important to the nation and performed a valuable public service, additionally, Sykes believed that advertisements would lower standards and recommended a license fee to fund public content (Crisell, 1997).

This early model led to the foundation of the archetype of public service broadcasters: The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). The BBC was founded by royal charter in 1926 with the stated mission of, “to inform, educate, and entertain,” which has remained unchanged for over 90 years (House of Lords, 2016). The BBC

remains a publicly funded organization, that has limited autonomy from the British state. The government does not have direct control of BBC operations, instead it is governed by a board of governors and a director-general, although, the board is appointed by the state (Crisell, 1997). The BBC continues to be funded by license fees paid by individuals within the UK who own television receivers to watch live television broadcasts or watch BBC programs online on the BBC's website (TV licensing), yet, it is the state that sets the price of licenses, not the BBC. The BBC's governing and funding structures are unique among the three media organizations being researched. While not receiving direct financing from the state, the BBC is still required to adhere to a legal structure presented in both its royal charter as well as its Framework Agreement with the UK Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. These two documents, grant the BBC its constitutional basis, as well as its independence from the government (Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016a; 2016b). Management of the BBC comes from two separate organizations, the BBC Trust as well as the BBC Executive Board. The Trust is comprised of 10 trustees as well as a chairman and vice-chairman (BBC Trust). Each member of the Trust is appointed by the Queen, with consultation with the Parliament and professional bureaucrats in the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The Trust is responsible for broad governance of the BBC, ensuring the interests of license holders are maintained. The operational management of the BBC is overseen by the Executive Board, which is comprised of 13 executives appointed by the Trust. The Royal Charter, which outlines the organizational structure, as well as the Framework Agreement, which regulates the BBC's activities, are issued by the UK government, which are only issued for fixed periods of time, and so must periodically be renewed. As part of the Agreement, the BBC is required to report on the proceedings of the British Parliament, broadcast government messages in the case of a national emergency, and provide political balance, additionally the BBC is prohibited from airing advertising, and editorializing (Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016a; 2016b).

In addition to a strong public service broadcasting history, the British media system also has a long history of commercial broadcasters, something unique in Europe. The BBC enjoyed a monopoly on the British airwaves for quite some time, but many in the UK questioned the value of this monopoly on British society. The Popular

Television Association, a civil society organization, was founded in July 1953, with the goal of educating the public on the dangers posed to society by a television monopoly (Briggs, 2000). This soon led to the passing of the Television Act of 1954, which legally broke the monopoly of the BBC and allowed for competition. On September 22, 1955 the first commercial broadcast, and first television advertisement, was viewed on British television (Crisell, 1997). In the decade that followed, little competition, and the British television system was comprised of only the BBC and the sole commercial competitor, Independent Television (ITV), however by the 1970's the UK had developed a pluralist media system comprised of increasing variety of commercial broadcasters, as well as a prominent public service broadcaster in the BBC (Medhurst, 2003). The British media system is unique in possessing both a strong public service broadcaster as well as a well-developed commercial broadcasting sector, as many media systems are comprised of one model or the other. As late as the 1980's the UK was one of three European nations without a media system completely dominated by publicly owned and run public service broadcasters (Noam, 1991).

Sky News is a well-developed commercial news producer with a history in the British media milieu stretching back to 1989. Sky was founded by the media entrepreneur Rupert Murdoch to take advantage of the increased availability and interest in satellite television at the time and was the first 24-hour news channel in the UK. As of December 2016, Sky is a publicly traded company, with Murdoch's 21<sup>st</sup> Century Fox holding the largest minority stake at 39% (Jackson & Martinson, 2016). Sky is governed by a board of directors, comprised of 11 individuals, with the stated role of taking "a long-term outlook and [seeing] itself as responsible to a wide range of stakeholders, whilst pursuing its objectives in a manner consistent with its statutory duties, for the benefit of the Company's members as a whole." (Sky plc, 2017, p. 38). Additionally, unlike other commercial news producers in the UK such as ITV, and Channel 4, Sky News is not a commercial public service broadcaster, and as such is not required to adhere to the same restrictions of content (Ramsey, 2016).

RT UK offers further model of ownership, unlike either commercial broadcasters or public service broadcasters. Founded in 2005, Russia Today was, and remains, solely funded by the Russian state, and quickly changed to the name 'RT' to create more distance between the organization and the Russian state (Yablokov, 2015).

According to the broadcasting license filed with the British regulatory authority on broadcasting, telecommunications, and postal technologies, The Office of Communications, commonly referred to as Ofcom, RT UK's broadcasting in the UK is operated by the Autonomous Non-Profit Organization (ANO) TV Novosti (Ofcom,n.d.). ANO TV Novosti is ostensibly an independent private organization, though the actual functioning of the organization remains opaque. This non-profit organization was spun off from the Russian government-owned media organization RIA Novosti in order to provide increased editorial and operational distance from the Russian state. RT UK was founded in London in 2014 with the stated goal of, "to challenge dominant power structures in Britain by broadcasting live and original programming with a progressive UK focus" and to "serve the needs and interests of the British public by promoting debate and new ways of thinking about specifically British issues" (RT, 2014). RT UK is one of several attempts of expeditionary media organizations to found production centers within the target market. RT UK is overseen by a single Editor-In-Chief and a Managing Director (RT, n.d.). The opacity of RT UK's management structure makes it difficult to track organizational responsibility, but operational funding comes directly from the Russian state, and has increased annually (Shuster, 2015; RT, n.d.). The ostensible editorial independence of RT was raised by Russian President Vladimir Putin in a 2013 interview with the organization wherein he stated,

*We never expected this to be a news agency or a channel which would defend the position of the Russian political line. We wanted to bring an absolutely independent news channel to the news arena. Certainly the channel is funded by the government, so it cannot help but reflect the Russian government's official position on the events in our country and in the rest of the world one way or another.*

RT UK also utilizes the motto, "Question More," and assumes a news agenda to offer alternatives to what it perceives as a hegemonic western, and specifically Anglo-Saxon, news media (Yablokov, 2015). Since RT UK's annual operational budget comes directly from the Russian State, the organization is not reliant on profits to continue to operate in the same way a commercial news organization is, nor is RT UK beholden to its audience as a direct operational funding model in the same way the BBC is.

## **Does Funding Influence Media Content?**

According to the Hierarchy of Influences theory, all individuals within a media organization ultimately answer to the owner, and therefore different ownership models should influence the content produced by varying media organizations (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Therefore, funding model serves as a better descriptor of what differentiates these three organizations. The variety in content produced by public service broadcasters and commercial broadcasters has been well researched in political communications studies (see: Wasburn, 1995; Roca-Cuberes, 2014). Throughout western democratic societies, public service content has been proved to produce content that is politically neutral, detailed, and longer than the content produced by commercial broadcasters (Newton, 2016). Media ownership influencing media content has been demonstrated across varying cultural settings, as well in reporting across different subject areas (see: Rogers, et. al., 2014; Ayish, 2010; Hollifield, 1999). This has been explained by the overriding mission of varying types of broadcasters. Public service broadcasters are accountable to the public, who fund these services, and in most cases, are legally required to remain neutral and provide information for citizens. Commercial broadcasters have a different mission, they operate as a business and as such their primary goal to make a profit, though commercial broadcasters vary depending upon the ownership structure. Corporate commercial news broadcasters are beholden to a board of directors and produce content that has previously been shown to be profitable, and are less likely to engage in risky or controversial news coverage in order to maximize their audiences and therefore their profits. Privately owned commercial news broadcasters, while still primarily concerned with generating profits, have more of a directive to produce content that will please the owner (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

While ownership has traditionally been used to describe the organizational variety, this is a difficult concept to utilize in this context, as RT UK is not necessarily owned by anyone, simply managed by a non-profit, and the BBC is owned by the British public. Instead, the primary difference between these three media organizations is the model of their funding. So, the issue then becomes whether funding models influence the content of the news media. J. Herbert Altschull, in his 1984 work *Agents*

*of Power: The Role of the news Media in Human Affairs*, asserted that one of the “laws of journalism” was that news media content always reflects the interests of those who finance the system. Shoemaker and Reese (2014) propose a more intricate model influencing news content production, but it still incorporates business models and funding models as influencing content. Dunaway (2013), while analyzing varying ownership models of privately owned newspapers, determined that those organizations that were most driven by profit maximization, namely corporately owned newspapers, with funding dispersed across many owners, produced more content with negative tones than did privately owned newspapers, where funding originated from a single owner. Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza (2012) explain the increased negative coverage in commercial news producers by its evolutionary and discursive relevance. Audiences are drawn to negative news because of a genetic hardwiring to protect oneself from threats, and profit maximizing organizations exploit this when creating news to attract the largest possible audience. Additional studies (see: Dunaway, 2008; Gentzkow, & Shapiro, 2010) have concluded that media organizations primarily concerned with profit maximization produce content which is more negative in tone, less detailed, with less focus on political issues and policy. All of these aspects of corporate media are driven by the desire to increase the audience size of these organizations and thereby increase profits.

Unlike commercial news organizations, public service broadcasters are believed to produce content that is more neutral and balanced than that of commercial broadcasters. Public service broadcasters are stipulated to produce content which “informs and educates, helps imagine the nation, enriches the lives and culture of its citizens and provides an inclusive public sphere to support democracy” (Esser, & Jensen, 2015, p.1). Specifically, the BBC in the UK is legally required to broadcast all designated political party broadcasts as well as referendum broadcasts (Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, 2016b). While the BBC is funded through license fees, these traits are also present in those public service providers that are funded from governments’ general funds as well. These requirements, in addition to a funding scheme that does not maximize profit seeking, or even incorporate profits whatsoever, should lead to the production of content that is diverse, politically neutral, detailed, and with a greater emphasis on policy (Newton, 2016).

RT UK is an expeditionary media organization funded by a foreign government, the Russian State, with its operational funding coming directly from a foreign budget. Since RT UK's funding is guaranteed, the organization is not concerned with profit maximization as a corporately owned media organization is. Additionally, RT UK is not obligated to fulfill any public service role, with no stipulation to produce content that will benefit the public. Instead, RT UK was founded, "to challenge dominant power structures in Britain by broadcasting live and original programming with a progressive UK focus," with individuals within the organization claiming to counter the hegemonic media system in the UK and "covering issues that have formerly remained beyond the media spotlight of the nation." (RT, 2014). Additionally, RT UK grew from a concerted effort by the Russian government to cultivate soft power abroad, and introduce a "Russian viewpoint" (RT, n.d.). Therefore, I propose that RT UK's coverage of the Brexit campaign will build agendas and frames that align with the interests of the Russian State, and which are separate from "traditional" British media organizations.

As public service broadcasters are required to produce content that benefits all segments of a society, they generally produce content that is longer and more detailed. Therefore BBC should construct its media agenda with more issues than either RT UK or Sky News.

*H1: BBC's agenda in its coverage of the Brexit campaign will include more issues than either that of the RT UK or Sky News.*

Since profit maximization behavior has been shown to influence the content production of corporate news organizations, this should be evident in the agenda building of Sky News' coverage of the Brexit campaign, with increased coverage of sensational issues that draw increased audience numbers. The BBC, meanwhile should construct an agenda that has more even coverage of various events in accordance with its mandate to provide the British public with information required on all aspects of the Brexit decision. Since RT UK's funding comes directly from the Russian State, RT UK's content is not driven by profit maximization, and therefore the coverage should highlight those issues which are pertinent to Russia. Additionally, RT UK's stated

mission to offer alternative coverage from the British media establishment, should emphasize alternative issues than either of the other two organizations.

*H2: RT UK and Sky News will construct agendas in coverage of the Brexit campaign with higher level of issue salience focused on fewer issues than will the BBC.*

Additionally, the organizational constraints on emotive language should be more influential in the political communication coverage of a public service broadcaster, due to its core mission of providing unbiased information, than either of the other two organizational types:

*H3: RT UK's and Sky News' coverage of the Brexit campaign will exhibit a greater range of attribute salience than will the BBC's coverage.*

However, profit maximization behavior should not influence RT UK to create consistently negative content such as a corporate media organization would through the exploitation of evolutionary and discursive relevance as described by Lengauer, Esser, & Berganza (2012). Also, by desiring to promote a Russian viewpoint that is promoted as an alternative to the hegemonic British media framing of issues, RT UK could positively frame issues which are universally framed as negative by traditional British media organizations. Therefore, while BBC's attribute salience should remain relatively neutral due to its organizational variables, Sky News should produce increasingly negative content, and RT UK should frame various issues as either negative or positive to highlight the Russian viewpoint or offer alternatives to the hegemonic media portrayal of varying issues.

*H4: Attribute salience surrounding all reported issues will be most negative in Sky news' coverage of the Brexit campaign, predominately neutral in the BBC's coverage, and polarized in RT UK's coverage.*



## **Methodology**

My research began with a quantitative textual content analysis of news stories published on the websites of three news media sources: the BBC, Sky News, and RT UK. The samples came from reporting in three distinct time periods in 2016: the week of February 21-27 when the date of the referendum vote was first announced by the Cameron Government, April 17-23 the first week the campaign officially began, and June 19-25 the week of the referendum vote. In conceptualizing the research to test hypothesis one, the agendas of each producer serve as the dependent variable, and the organizational constraints serve as independent variables. Testing hypothesis two is conceptualized similarly, with the frames around each issue serving as the independent variable and the organizations again serving as the dependent variables. I controlled for as many unintended variables as possible by analyzing all Brexit related reporting during the same distinct timeframe.

### **The Media Organizations**

The organizational differences driven by their respective funding models of the three news media producers serve as the independent variables in this research. It is important to note that these three media sources, the BBC, Sky News, and RT UK, were selected for examination because of the similarities between the three organizations. These organizations comprise three of the four 24-hour news broadcasters available over the UK terrestrial broadcasting platform Freeview. In addition to the widespread distribution via digital terrestrial broadcasting, the television broadcasts of the three organizations are carried on a variety of cable and satellite providers throughout the UK. Besides the prominent position of the three news organizations on British televisions, they also have very active online presences; the Facebook page of RT has over 4 million likes, that of Sky News has over 7 million, and BBC News has over 40 million. Also, all three organizations have active English-language websites where they publish regularly. By selecting organizations with such similar outlets, I hoped to control for more micro level variables. For example, the routines of a broadsheet journalist could be sufficiently varied from that of a television news writer to influence the dependent variables. Additionally, all three organizations are based in the UK, and produce

content within the UK. By excluding media content produced in different societal environments, I hope to control for variables at the social systems level.

### **Timeframe**

I selected the three time periods (February 21-27, April 17-23, and June 19-25, 2016) for analysis because they offer a sufficient depth and diversity of reporting. These varied time frames each correspond with important events in the referendum campaign, February 21-27 corresponds with the first full week after official announcement on February 20<sup>th</sup> by the Cameron government of that the referendum vote would take place on June 23<sup>rd</sup>. The week of April 17-23 corresponds with the week immediately following the naming of the official leave and stay campaigns on April 15<sup>th</sup>. The week of June 19-25 corresponds with the polling day on June 23<sup>rd</sup> and announcement of the results on June 24<sup>th</sup>. These important periods in the campaign ensure considerable coverage by all three media organizations. Additionally, by analyzing reporting in a varied temporal scale throughout the campaign, I attempted to ensure sufficient variety of the larger scale agendas and framing constructed by each organization. The varied time scale also was utilized to reduce the likelihood that a single external variable would be able to dominate the reporting of all three organizations over that period of time.

### **Referendum**

I chose the Brexit referendum campaign as the subject of comparison because of the amount of autonomy media organizations had in constructing agendas and frames. A myriad of different interests coalesced in the “leave” and “stay” camps for varied reasons. This variety of voices incorporated different British political parties, NGOs, and business interests, and as such there is less of a coherent message from the political elite driving the agenda and frame building in the media (Wirth, et. al., 2010). Additionally, this referendum incorporated a strong relevance for the British public for the same reason that so many disparate parties were involved in the campaign, the decision to leave the EU would impact nearly every aspect of the lives of citizens of the UK. EU membership has shaped not only those policy areas influencing international cooperation within the UK, but influences nearly every domestic and foreign policy

area, and even has influenced national norms and values (Kassim, Peters, & Wright, 2000).

### **Operationalization**

In order to determine how each organization built their agendas and frames around the Brexit campaign a single researcher hand coded all stories containing the terms “Brexit” or “referendum” published on the websites of each of the three news organizations throughout three distinct one-week periods. Quantitative content analysis was undertaken to analyze the amount of data necessary to determine the larger trends in agenda building and frame building at the organizational level, a more critical analysis of a smaller sample size of reporting may not accurately encounter organizational variation, as the smaller samples selected could be heavily influenced by individual reporters, or routines. Coding was conducted by hand despite the advent of automated coding software, as this is still the “gold standard” in content analysis, and allows for a more nuanced analysis of tone than does computerized content analysis (Krippendorff, 2004).

To begin, I created a coding frame (see: appendix 1) used for the analysis. This was done by first selecting five random articles from each of the three organizations at arbitrary periods, outside of the periods of analysis, throughout the campaign. Each sentence from these 15 articles was then printed out onto small strips of paper. These sentences were then grouped by theme, and each code was developed from these groupings (Vogt, 2011). Those codes that are central to this study include those I labeled:

*Horse race* – polling data and public perception of individuals or campaigns.

*Economy* – the effects of remaining or leaving on the British economy directly, jobs, and currency valuation.

*Coalition Building* – which actors (politicians, NGOs, celebrities, etc.) are joining which camp.

*Migration* – movement of people into or out of the UK.

*Sovereignty* – stories regarding the UK making its own laws, self-rule, or imposed law from the EU.

*EU Reform* – renegotiating the relationship between the UK and EU.

*Trade* – coverage of free trade, trade deals, or the single market.

*Security* – references to national defense, or security threats.

*Uncertainty* – the ambiguity of what leaving or remaining means for the future of the UK or the EU.

*Sport* – coverage of any specific sport (i.e. football), sport generally, or athletes and the effect of a potential Brexit.

*US-UK Relations* – any mention of the “special relationship” or any relations between the US and the UK.

*Healthcare* – coverage of healthcare professionals, the NHS, or medication.

Coding was conducted on a sentence level of analysis, and the stories analyzed directly from the websites of each news media organization; [www.bbc.co.uk/news](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news), [www.rt.com/uk/](http://www.rt.com/uk/), and [news.sky.com](http://news.sky.com). By analyzing native content from the source websites, instead of relying on databases of reports such as LexisNexis, I was able to better understand the nuanced communications present in the pieces that might not be available on text-only databases, such as in photos, embedded videos, and tweets, all of which could be important in determining the varied tone surrounding issues necessary to understand frame building. I chose to rely on a single coder so that this research was not concerned with inter-coder reliability.

### **Testing Hypotheses One and Two**

Following data collection, I analyzed the raw data into usable metrics. The occurrence of each issue in the coverage of each media organization was weighed against the sum of issue coverage of the same media organization to determine the relative salience placed on the issue by the organization.

$$SI_n = \frac{\sum CI_n}{\sum C}$$

Where  $SI_n$  is the Salience of Issue n

$CI_n$  is the Coverage of Issue n

$C$  is the Coverage of all Issues

From this analysis, I was able to determine the relative salience placed on each issue by all three of the media organizations, and thereby have a metric with which to compare the salience placed on each issue by the BBC, Sky News, and RT UK.

### **Testing Hypothesis Three and Four**

In order to determine the frames constructed by the varied media organizations, testing hypothesis three relied on a qualitative analysis along with the initial quantitative analysis associated with testing hypotheses one and two. In addition to determining the

salience of issues, I analyzed the emotive language, images, and videos utilized in the reporting of the various issues to determine the attribute salience of each issue. This information was coded simultaneously with the quantity of issue coverage using a three-point scale of negative, neutral, or positive. This attribution will comprise a scale from -1 to +1, -1 being a negative attribution to the issue, 0 being a neutral attribution, and +1 being a positive attribution, such that:

$$AS = \frac{A_1 + A_2 + \cdots A_n}{nA}$$

Where  $AS$  is attribute salience

$A_1$  is the first attribution,  $A_2$  the second, etc

$nA$  is the total number of attributes for the issue

Which will give a total attribute salience numeric value between -1 and 1. This method of analysis allows for framing neutrality to be the result of either overall neutral language by the content producer, or a pluralistic presentation of both positive and negative views of a single issue. This metric was then used to compare the relative framing of each issue between the various media organizations.

## **Results**

### **Issue Salience**

Upon completion of coding for all of the referendum related stories over the length of the analyzed period, the total number of stories for each media organizations was:

BBC:  $n = 152$

Sky News:  $n = 132$

RT UK:  $n = 71$

The total number of recorded issues throughout the analyzed period consisted of:

BBC:  $n = 2890$

Sky News:  $n = 1970$

RT UK:  $n = 887$

*Table 1. Issue Salience in Sky News*

<i><b>Issue</b></i>	<i><b>Frequency Reported</b></i>	<i><b>Issue Salience</b></i>
Economy	424	0.222
Horserace	408	0.214
Coalition Building	217	0.114
Migration	209	0.110
Sovereignty	92	0.048
EU Reform	88	0.046
Trade	85	0.045
Security	62	0.033
Uncertainty	43	0.023
US-UK Relations	31	0.016
Sport	27	0.014
Healthcare	23	0.012
British-Irish Relations	19	0.010

Throughout the period of analysis the issue salience of those issues comprising at least 1% of Sky News' coverage consisted of considerable coverage of two very prominent issues with issue salience scores of 0.2 or higher: Economy, and Horserace; two moderately prominent issues with issue salience scores between 0.1 and 0.2: Coalition Building, and Migration; and nine slightly prominent issues with issue salience scores between 0.01 and 0.1: Sovereignty, EU Reform, Trade, Security, Uncertainty, US-UK Relations, Sport, Healthcare, and British-Irish Relations as seen in *Table 1*.



*Table 2. Issue Salience in the BBC*

<i><b>Issue</b></i>	<i><b>Frequency Reported</b></i>	<i><b>Issue Salience</b></i>
Economy	522	0.181
Horserace	443	0.153
Coalition Building	297	0.103
Migration	287	0.099
Sovereignty	201	0.070
Trade	168	0.058
EU Reform	136	0.047
Security	95	0.033
Uncertainty	75	0.026
Research	67	0.023
Agriculture	65	0.022
US-UK Relations	58	0.020
Environmental Policy	56	0.019
EU Funds	53	0.018
Healthcare	33	0.011
Irrevocability	32	0.011

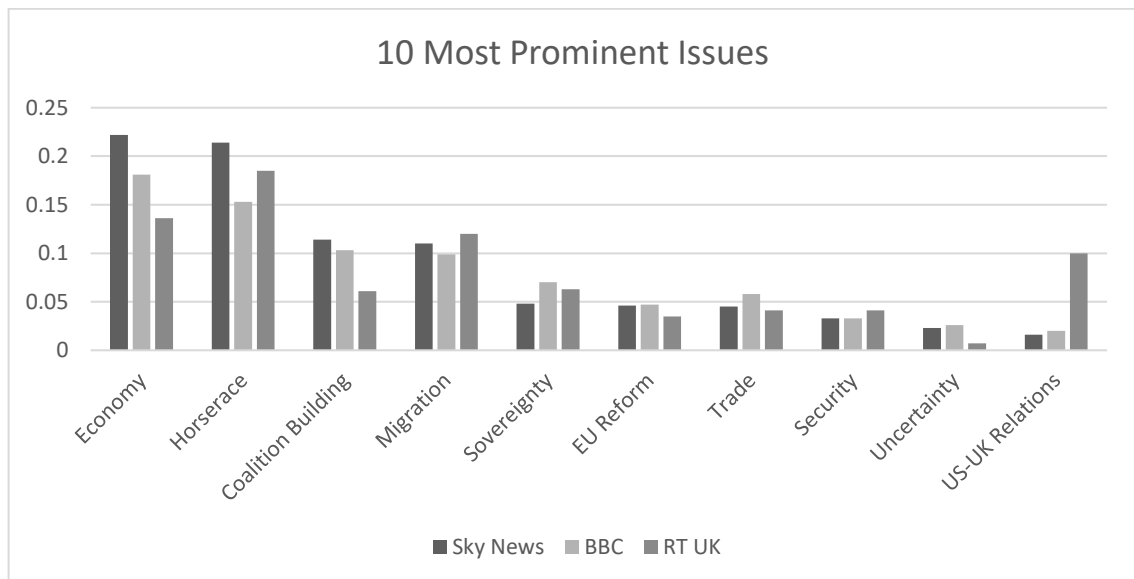
Throughout this period the issue salience comprising at least 1% of the BBC's coverage consisted of no very prominent issues with issue salience scores above 0.2; three moderately prominent issues with issue salience scores between 0.1 and 0.2: Economy, Horserace, and Coalition Building; and 13 slightly prominent issues with issue salience scores between 0.10 and 0.1: Migration, Sovereignty, Trade, EU Reform, Security, Uncertainty, Research, Agriculture, US-UK Relations, Environmental Policy, EU Funds, Healthcare, and Irrevocability as evident in *Table 2*.

*Table 3. Issue Salience in the RT UK*

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Frequency Reported</i>	<i>Issue Salience</i>
Horserace	164	0.185
Economy	121	0.136
Migration	106	0.120
US-UK Relations	85	0.100
Sovereignty	56	0.063
Coalition Building	54	0.061
Security	36	0.041
Trade	36	0.041
EU Reform	31	0.035
Racism	16	0.018
British-Irish Relations	16	0.018
Nazism	10	0.011
Workers' Rights	9	0.010
Influence	9	0.010
Turkish EU Membership	9	0.010

Throughout this period the issue salience comprising at least 1% of RT UK's coverage consisted of no very prominent issues with issue salience scores above 0.2; four moderately prominent issues with issue salience scores between 0.1 and 0.2: Horserace, Economy, Migration, and US-UK Relations; and 11 slightly prominent issues with issue salience scores between 0.10 and 0.1: Sovereignty, Coalition Building, Security, Trade, EU Reform, Racism, British-Irish Relations, Nazism, Workers' Rights, Influence, and Turkish EU Membership as demonstrated in *Table 3*.

*Figure 4* demonstrates the 10 most prominent issues as covered by all three media organizations analyzed. It is clear from this figure that the general media agenda was constructed relatively consistently between the three organizations, with some obvious differences. Sky News was the only organization to produce content with issue salience scores greater than 0.2 in coverage of the economy and horserace. While these two issues were also the most prominent in the coverage of the other two organizations, no other organization devoted so much of their reportage to these issues. The BBC's coverage of the Brexit campaign has clearly placed more salience on the issues of the economy and horserace coverage and follows the same general trend in issue salience as has Sky News, however has more even coverage, unlike the precipitous drops that characterize Sky News' issue salience. RT UK's coverage generally reported on the same issues as the two traditional British media organizations, with the key exception of heavily reporting on US-UK Relations in the context of the Brexit campaign, and devoting little coverage to the uncertainty associated with a vote to leave.



*Figure 4. Most Prominent Issues*

### Attribute Salience

*Table 4* shows the attribute salience of those issues that had sufficient coverage to provide statistically significant results for at least two of the three media organizations. From this data there is no clear trend or commonality among the

different organizations regarding the method in which issues were framed, with the exception of a nearly universal trend towards negative emotive language from all organizations.

*Table 4. Attribute Salience*

<i><b>Issue</b></i>	<i><b>Sky News</b></i>	<i><b>BBC</b></i>	<i><b>RT UK</b></i>
Economy	-.34	-.17	-.56
Horserace	-.35	-.15	-.30
Coalition Building	-.27	-.08	-.13
Migration	-.34	-.11	-.49
Sovereignty	-.29	-.07	-.36
US-UK Relations	-.06	-.15	-.73
EU Reform	-.08	-.12	-.16
Trade	-.16	-.08	-.47
Security	.13	.07	-.22
Uncertainty	-.42	-.17	n/a
Sport	.22	.11	n/a
Healthcare	.04	-.24	n/a
EU Funds	-.22	.11	n/a
Second Referendum	-.47	-.13	n/a
Scottish Independence	-.08	-.18	n/a
Future Generations	-.36	-.10	n/a
Agriculture	-.11	.12	n/a
British-Irish Relations	-.26	n/a	-.38

Additionally, I charted the total range of attribute salience for each media organization or all issues with at least ten reported instances to determine the total tone of reporting across the Brexit debate. *Figure 5* shows this total, with Sky News'

coverage possessing a range of attribute salience scores from -.60 to .22 with the majority of coverage trending negative from -.34 to -.08 and a median score of -.24 and a mean of -.20. Excluding a single outlier, that of the issue Influence, with an attribute salience score of 0.50, BBC's coverage consists of attribute salience scores ranging from -.29 to .14, the majority trending slightly negative of neutral from -.17 to .05 with a median score of -.10 and a mean of -.08. RT UK's coverage is comprised of entirely negative attribute salience scores ranging from -.80 to -.13, the majority falling between -.65 and -.24, with a median score of -.43 and a mean of -.44.

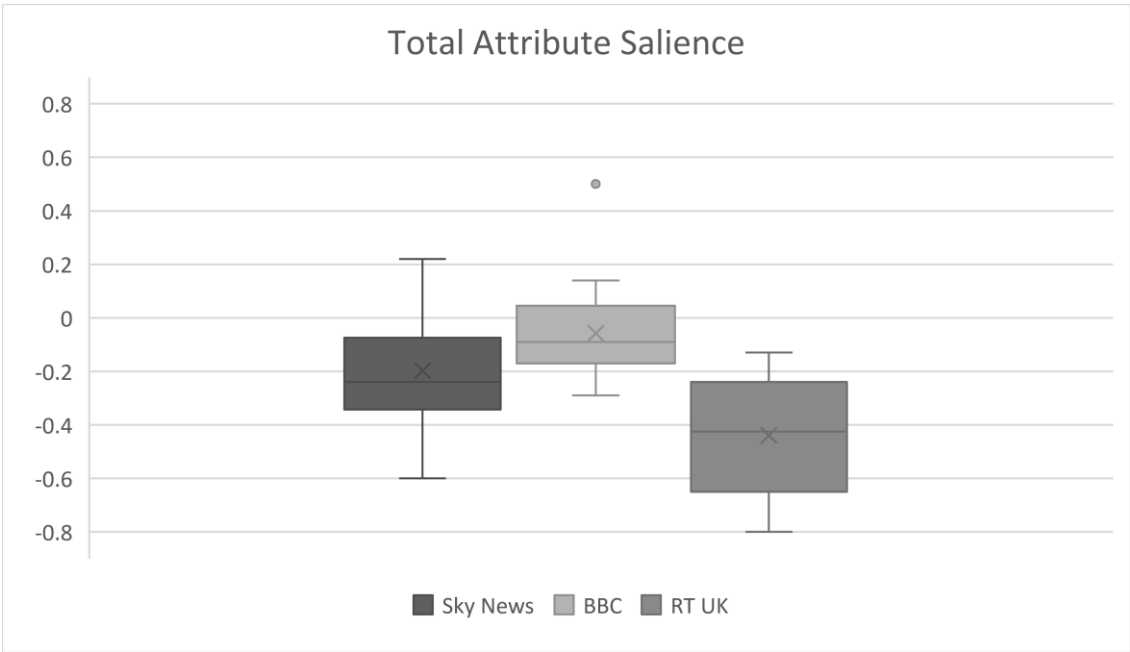


Figure 5. Attribute Salience of All Coverage

## **Discussion**

### **Agenda Building**

When reviewing the results from the issue salience survey, there are clear trends between all three media organizations to highlight potential economic implications of the referendum result and to report heavily on horserace stories. Following those issues, the BBC and Sky News devoted considerable time to coalition building stories, which RT UK did not focus on nearly as much. After those issues, the three organizations placed similar importance on the issues of migration, sovereignty, EU reform, trade, and security. Subsequently, the BBC and Sky News produced content regarding the uncertainty of the UK leaving the EU, an issue that was not featured as prominently in RT UK's coverage. The final issue of note is that of US-UK relations; while this was reported on by all three news producers, it was featured considerably more visibly in RT UK's coverage than in the other organizations.

Horserace coverage has become ubiquitous in contemporary campaign journalism, and so it is not surprising that it played such a prominent role in all three media organizations coverage of the Brexit campaign (Matthews, Pickup, & Cutler, 2012). Horserace coverage has been shown to dominate political campaign coverage since at least the early 1990s because it draws in audiences. There is debate as to why this is, but it is a reality of contemporary campaign journalism (Iyengar, Norpoth, & Hahn, 2004). This coverage increased towards the end of the campaign, as polls continued to show a closer race between the two camps, contrary to what many believed would be a sure thing for the remain camp at the beginning of the campaign. It is unsurprising then, that all three media organizations featured horserace stories so prominently.

Along with horserace coverage, BBC and Sky News devoted considerable content to coalition building. This coverage was likely featured so prominently given the nature of the referendum campaign. Coalition building coverage persisted throughout the campaign, but was particularly prevalent in the first week of analysis. Of particular note was the division of members within traditional British political parties. Prime Minister David Cameron, who called the referendum, in part, to unify his own Conservative Party, which was divided over European Union membership (Curtice, 2016), and so, permitted his cabinet and other prominent Conservatives to campaign

however they chose, instead of following the official government position. A story heavily reported on in this period was the decision of London Mayor, Boris Johnson, to join the leave camp, with headlines from the BBC including, “Will Boris Johnson Sway the EU referendum result?”, and “Boris Johnson 'expected to back EU exit.'” Sky News also featured coalition building stories, with the headlines, “Boris Johnson Backs Campaign To Leave EU” and “Boris Announces Who He Will Back in EU Campaign.” So, it is of note that while RT UK’s constructed does agenda feature considerable coalition building coverage, it comprises a significantly lesser proportion of the total agenda than the other two organizations. The issue salience score of RT UK’s coverage is 0.061, considerably lower than both Sky News’ at 0.114, and the BBC at 0.103. This is likely tied to RT UK’s funding model, particularly its mandate from its governing organization to provide a Russian viewpoint, which is focused more on external issues and explanations than domestic British politics, despite claiming that they are the “only major UK news broadcaster headquartered near the corridors of power, just minutes from the four pillars the UK establishment - the Supreme Court, the Church of England, Whitehall and the Palace of Westminster” (RT, 2014).

The economic implications of the UK leaving the EU was the cornerstone of the remain campaign. For the entirety of the campaign, the remain camp warned of the economic risks to a myriad of industries, while emphasizing the importance of membership within the single market and the benefits of free trade with Europe to the British economy. The leave camp also heavily referenced the British economy, citing issues such as the sums of money that the UK pays to the EU and stating that EU regulations were stifling the British economy. The economy was heavily tied to many other issues surrounding the debate as well. The issue of migration was closely related to the economy on both sides, with the remain camp citing the benefits brought about by the free movement of people, and the leave camp claiming that European labor migrants were outcompeting unemployed British job seekers. The economy was also closely linked with the issue of agriculture, as the remain camp touted the importance of EU subsidies for British farmers, while the leave campaign claimed the EU’s Common Agriculture Policy disadvantaged British farmers, who would benefit economically by leaving. Because of this prominence of the economic arguments for both leaving and remaining, as well as the intertwined nature of the British economy with many disparate

issues, it is unsurprising that this issue would feature so conspicuously throughout all three media organizations and was a major aspect of the media agenda.

The issue of US-UK relations was featured in the agenda of all three media organizations, primarily due to a visit by then US president Barack Obama to the UK on April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016. At this time, he made statements that the UK would be best served by remaining in the EU, and that “I think it’s fair to say that maybe some point down the line there might be a UK-US trade agreement, but it’s not going to happen any time soon because our focus is in negotiating with a big bloc, the European Union, to get a trade agreement done... The UK is going to be in the back of the queue” (The Guardian, 2016). This statement contradicted the leave campaign’s claim that, were the UK to leave the EU, it would be free to pursue trade agreements with any country and not restricted to greater EU trade agreements. Following Obama’s statement, Boris Johnson claimed that the statements were hypocritical, claiming that, “I think there’s a weird paradox when the President of the United States, a country that would never dream of sharing its sovereignty over anything, instructs or urges us politely to get more embedded in the EU, which is already making 60% of our laws” (BBC, 2016). While this issue was reported on by both the BBC and Sky News, with issue salience scores of 0.020 and 0.016 respectively, it featured more centrally in RT UK’s agenda building of the Brexit campaign, with an issue salience score of 0.100. This is the most prominent shift in agenda building, and demonstrates the connections between RT UK and the Russian State. Much of this coverage parroted the Russian concerns about the preservation of sovereignty (Laidi, 2012), and anti-Americanism (Shlapentokh, 2009).

Of particular note regarding the constructed agendas is the commonality among the three organizations. The majority of all content was comprised the same eight core issues: economy, horserace, coalition building, migration, sovereignty, EU reform, trade, and security. In addition, there is strong correlation in the ranking of issues, using Pearson’s  $r$  correlation coefficient:



$$r = \frac{\sum (x - \bar{x})(y - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum (x - \bar{x})^2 \sum (y - \bar{y})^2}}$$

Where  $\bar{x}$  is the sample mean of organization  $x$

And  $\bar{y}$  is the sample mean of organization  $y$

From these samples the  $r$  correlation coefficient values are 0.98 for Sky News and the BBC, 0.91 for Sky News and RT UK, and 0.87 for the BBC and RT UK. This strong correlation suggests that some other variable has a greater influence on agenda building. It would make sense that higher order variables, those at the levels of institutions and social systems, would place considerable pressure on these diverse media organizations to cover those issues that make up the bulk of the common agenda. Much of the coverage that was repeated among the three organizations. For example, much of the economy coverage across the three organizations included many of the same quotes and figures from external institutions, such as the Bank of England, and business leaders from the Financial Times Stock Exchange 100 index. Additionally, much of the US-UK relations coverage utilized the same information provided by the US president, and coalition building content included the same quotes and statements provided by British political parties and leaders. All of this suggesting that institutional influencers may be more influential to agenda building than those at the organizational level. Although, as all three organizations create content within the UK, the agenda could also reflect those issues which are valued by British society, and therefore be influenced by social system influences.

In addition to the 10 prominent issues discussed above, all three organizations' agenda included additional issues which comprised at least 1% of all reporting. For the BBC, this included six additional issues: research, agriculture, environmental policy, EU funds, healthcare, and the irrevocability of the vote. With the exception of the irrevocability of the vote, these issues focus on real policy implications of both sides of the debate. The healthcare issue was prominent due to the leave campaign's insistence that the British government sends £350 million per week to the EU and they propose spending this money instead on the National Health Service (NHS). This claim was

written across a campaign bus used by the official leave campaign, and spurred debate about the actual ramifications of the referendum on the healthcare system of the UK. These are issues that affect the lives of British citizens and would be influenced by the outcome of the referendum.

Sky News' agenda consisted of three additional issues: sport, healthcare, and British-Irish relations. As with the BBC, Sky News reported on the healthcare debate prompted by the leave campaign's bus slogan. The Republic of Ireland is the only EU member state that has a land border with the UK, and Sky News' coverage of relations between the two countries focused heavily on sensational news regarding the implications of a Brexit for the Northern Ireland Peace process, claiming, "The armoured police checkpoints and customs posts are long gone but Ireland has been exploring the cost of having to re-instate at least some controls." (Blevins, 2016). The sport coverage was primarily centered around David Beckham's announcement that he was voting to remain within the EU. This led to increased coverage of various sports celebrities announcing which camp they supported, and some light debate regarding the impact of the free movement of people on the development and quality of sport within the UK.

RT UK's agenda included six additional issues that made up at least 1% of all reporting: racism, British-Irish relations, Nazism, Turkish EU membership, workers' rights, and influence. Additionally, the issue of uncertainty, which was in the core of the BBC and Sky News' agenda, was absent from RT UK's, with an issue salience score of only 0.007. The coverage of British-Irish relations followed much the same theme as the coverage in Sky News, with sensationalized accounts of the potential breakdown of the Northern Ireland peace process, and the possibility of Irish reunification. The issues of racism and Nazism appeared towards the end of the campaign and were covered by all three media organizations. UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage actively campaigned against immigration, which led some in the remain camp to accuse his rhetoric of including racist overtones, particularly following the rollout of a poster entitled "Breaking Point" that featured a group of Syrian refugees entering Slovenia. RT UK reported, "The billboard has also come under criticism for its striking similarity to a 1941 Nazi newsreel showing a long line of Jewish refugees on a forced march." (RT, 2016). Workers' rights coverage focused on Labour party leader

Jeremy Corbyn's campaign to remain, which relied on the claim that British workers would be better protected by remaining in the EU. The issue of Turkey's membership in the EU was raised by the leave camp late in the campaign to emphasize the threat of increasing numbers of EU labor migrants entering the UK. The issue of British influence was raised by both camps, remain claiming that Britain's global influence was amplified by remaining a member of the EU, and leave claiming that Britain's voice would be stronger out. All of these issues that are present in RT UK's agenda are also present in the other two media organizations' reporting, albeit in much lower proportions. With only 71 published stories over the entire period of analysis, this is likely a product of RT UK's overall lower coverage of the Brexit campaign, than an emphasis by RT UK.

From these results, hypothesis one was proved correct. BBC's overall agenda consisted of 16 separate issues, Sky News' agenda consisted of 13 separate agendas, and RT UK's agenda consisted of 15 separate agendas. The difference between the BBC and Sky News is marked but expected from the literature regarding public service media and commercial media. While the core 10 issues overlapped between the two organizations, the content which differed is significant, with BBC's unique agenda focusing on policy implications, while Sky News focused on sensational stories and sport. RT UK's agenda, while consisting of fewer issues than BBC's, was less statistically significant. Those issues unique to RT UK were likely emphasized by the relative dearth of reporting on the common issues.

Hypothesis two has mixed results. The difference between the BBC and Sky News is evident. Sky News placed considerable emphasis on economy and horserace coverage, with issue salience scores of 0.222 and 0.214, respectively, then exhibited a precipitous drop of 0.100 in issue salience in the next issue. The BBC also placed the most salience on the economy and horserace coverage; these scores were lower than those of Sky News at 0.181 and 0.153, respectively. Additionally, the shift in issue salience towards the next issue was half of that of Sky News at 0.050. RT UK's agenda building was not consistent with hypothesis two, as the levels of issue salience were similar to those of the BBC. RT UK also had the most emphasis on the issues of horserace and the economy with issue salience scores of 0.185 and 0.136, respectively, and the difference between these and the following issue is 0.016, much lower than

either of the other two organizations. So, regarding hypothesis two, Sky News' agenda construction heavily favored two issues, which together comprised nearly half of all Sky News' Brexit coverage, while BBC and RT UK presented more even coverage on additional issues.

Regarding agenda building, there appears to be some evidence that funding model has an influence, though that influence is moderated by other factors. The majority of the media agenda presented by all three organizations comprised of the same core issues, leading me to conclude that agenda building is likely more heavily influenced by variables elsewhere in the Hierarchy of Influences model. However, the instances where the agendas do diverge between the three organizations show strong preference for the funding model of the given organization. For example, RT UK's highlighting of US-UK relations, as well as the relative diminished focus on coalition building, demonstrate a clear interest in coverage that corresponds with Russian national interests.

### **Frame Building**

There is considerable variety in how the assorted media organizations represent the issues present in their agendas. From my results, there is no readily discernable pattern or commonality in the framing of the issues, with the highest Pearson's  $r$  value of 0.65 between Sky News and the BBC, and the lowest 0.14 between Sky News and RT UK. In this regard, organizational variables appear to have considerable influence on how issues are framed.

In Sky News' coverage of the Brexit debate, issues ranged from a maximum attribute salience score of 0.22 for sport to a minimum score of -0.47 for second referendum. Sport coverage consisted primarily of British sporting celebrities supporting one side of the referendum or the other, often attempting to explain how their position benefitted sport in the UK. Sky News focused primarily on the celebrities, without much substance on the debate regarding sport in the UK. Besides sport, Sky News only had three additional issues with positive attribute salience scores: security, conservative party leadership, and healthcare. The remaining 18 issues with sufficient coverage to determine reliable attribute salience scores all trended negative, with uncertainty and second referendum coverage possessing the most negative attribution. Sky News often repeated the rhetoric from the remain campaign that

leaving was a “leap in the dark” and a risk to British voters, with little coverage of the leave camp’s assurances to the contrary. Regarding a potential second referendum, Sky News published stories such as, “Cameron Rules Out Second EU Referendum” and “Barroso: Second EU Referendum 'unthinkable'” which repeated the assurance of the impossibility of a second referendum by both sides. This predominately negative coverage aligns with existing literature regarding the prevalence of negative coverage by commercial media producers to draw audiences.

The BBC had much more neutral coverage, with nearly all issues falling between -0.29 and 0.14, with the exception of a single outlier: influence. British influence was covered positively with an attribute salience score of 0.50. I believe that this may be due to the BBC’s position as the British national broadcaster, which is itself a tool for the UK’s global influence, and therefore whose organizational variables could have prompted the organization to only cover positive attributes of British influence in the world. Excluding this outlier, BBC’s coverage remains mostly neutral, trending slightly negative, without a wide spread of emotive connotations. These results further fit with the literature regarding public service broadcasters producing coverage that is neutral and balanced.

RT UK’s framing of issues was universally negative, with attribute salience scores ranging from -.13 to -.80. The least negative issue was that of coalition building, while the most negative was that of US-UK relations. The prodigiously negative coverage portrays Obama’s statements as violating Britain’s sovereignty, as evidenced by “Obama should look at American history before intervening in British politics” (RT, 2016a) and “described Obama’s intervention as ‘*misguided*’ and argued that the United States must respect the sovereignty of other nations.” (RT, 2016c). This reiterates the findings in the agenda building section wherein RT UK’s content echoes Russian state positions with conspicuous anti-Americanism (Shirayev, & Zubok, 2000), as well as a high valuation on sovereignty (Ziegler, 2012). Additionally, the low absolute values in attribute salience scores suggest that due to its funding structure, RT UK is not subject to the same organizational constraints that the other organizations are. The guaranteed funding stream allows RT UK to frame issues considerably more negative than Sky News, which would be concerned with scaring off potential customers (Kleemans,

Heniks-Vettehen, Beentjes, & Eisinga, 2012), or the BBC, which risks alienating license fee payers.

The issue of security ranged from an attribute salience score of -.22 from RT UK, .07 from the BBC, and .13 by Sky News. The range of scores points to significant influence from organizational variables. The BBC's score is the result of balanced coverage, explaining the risks and benefits presented for both leaving and remaining in the EU. Sky News' coverage, only focused on those statements readily available which promoted the benefits and highlighted the importance of the UK's continued membership in the EU, without offering any alternative views. RT UK's considerably negative score is due to coverage that disparaged NATO and attempts at European security cooperation.

The differences in overall tone is evident in *figure 5, p 50*. Excluding the outlier, influence in BBC's coverage, Sky News' has the greatest overall diversity in attribute salience over a range of 0.69, followed by RT UK with a total difference of 0.67. BBC maintains a much more consistent tone, only ranging 0.43. This validates hypothesis three. While I expected to see some positive reporting from RT UK, the total range of negative attribution was much greater than that of BBC. This finding confirms existing views of public service broadcasters producing content that is balanced.

Hypothesis four was mostly disproved. The BBC did produce the most neutral content, with a mean total attribute salience score of -.08. While Sky News did produce a majority of negative content, with a mean total attribute salience score of -.20, it was not as negative as RT UK's coverage at -.44. Kleemans, Heniks Vettehen, Beentjes, and Eisinga (2012) have demonstrated that certain demographics prefer neutral content to negative content, and therefore profit maximizing behaviors could potentially limit the amount of negative content presented in Sky News' coverage. RT UK as an organization not driven by profit maximization does not have the same restrictions and therefore was able to produce much more negative content. This does not address the portion of hypothesis four addressing the polarity of RT UK's coverage, which must be rejected as there was not a single issue framed positively by the organization.

## **Potential Issues**

When considering potential issues with my research, the first problem that comes to mind is confirmation bias. Since I alone developed the hypotheses and collected all of the data, my results may have been affected. The qualitative judgement regarding attribute salience is particularly vulnerable to this issue. In an ideal version of this experiment a separate researcher, with no prior knowledge of the hypotheses would have collected the data to negate this potential effect. Though I was aware of this potential problem and was sure to remain as critical as possible, and recorded all the emotive language which I used to make my determinations as an extra justification.

Preferably, this research would have included all of the Brexit coverage from all three media organizations throughout the entirety of the debate. Unfortunately, that level of analysis was not possible given the limited scope of this project. This was overcome by selecting three distinct period throughout the campaign. While this mostly remedied concerns, the results would have benefitted from including a larger sample size.

## Conclusion

The media's influence on public opinion surrounding political communications remains an important issue. Electorate engagement with information delivered from the media can assist facilitation of meaningful political debate. The advent of the internet has allowed for an increased variety of voices to enter the media landscape, and while many welcome this change as increasing pluralism and giving a voice to previously unheard minorities, others decry organizations as "fake news" or propaganda. With more and more states investing in expeditionary media organizations, with claimed editorial independence, the issue of objectivity arises. Therefore, understanding what causes various media organizations to produce the content that they do, is important for regulators trying to balance press freedoms with the threats of hostile narratives. As such I set out to answer the research question: "Do different funding models influence agenda building and frame building in different news organizations?"

To answer this question, I selected the 2016 campaign for the British referendum on EU membership, due to the diversity of issues included in the debate and nature of referendum campaigns. Throughout three distinct weeks in the campaign, February 21-27, April 17-23, and June 19-25, a single coder analyzed all reporting from the native websites of three distinct British media organizations: the BBC, Sky News, and RT UK. This content was coded by issue to determine which issues were prominently reported throughout each selected period of analysis by each organization. Additionally, each instance of a given issue being reported was assigned an emotive score between -1 and 1 to determine how each issue was reported by each organization. This data was then statistically analyzed to determine how the Brexit agenda was constructed by each organization, that is to say, which issues were most prominently featured in the reporting, and how each issue was framed by the various organizations, or how the issues were described.

Utilizing this data, I was able to bring some clarity to my research question. Regarding agenda building, there were both important differences as well as key similarities between the agendas constructed by the three media organizations. For all three organizations, the bulk of their agenda consisted of the same eight core issues: economy, horserace, coalition building, migration, sovereignty, EU reform, trade, and



security. For all three organizations, these eight issues comprised at least 68% of all Brexit campaign coverage. In addition, these eight core issues were presented in similar orders of issue salience.

Outside of these eight core issues, the remaining issues highlighted by each organization do point to funding influences. The remainder of Sky News' agenda consists of few issues, and these issues are generally more superficial and entertainment focused. The remainder of the BBC's agenda contains the highest number of additional issues, which are generally more informative and policy oriented. RT UK's remaining agenda focused heavily on US-UK relations, an issue that is of concern to the Russian state, who funds RT UK.

This research, therefore, has shown that while organizational variables can influence agenda building, this influence appears to be limited. This is best exemplified through RT UK's launch announcement, which stated, "RT UK will provide a welcomed media presence in Britain, covering issues that have formerly remained beyond the media spotlight of the nation." (RT, 2014). Despite this, the bulk of RT UK's agenda surrounding the Brexit campaign consisted of issues that were also prominent in the other organizations. It is likely that higher order variables, such as those at the institutional level are more important in driving agenda construction. The similarities in agenda constructions point to "the media" as an institution as being more heavily influenced by other institutions regarding what issues get reported, rather than by internal organizational variables.

However, when it comes to frame building, this research suggests that the media organization does have considerable influence. This study was unable to determine any common patterns of attribute salience between the three organizations, as every issue was uniquely described by each media organization. The BBC, was shown to deliver content which predominantly neutrally frames issues, with a narrow range of emotive descriptions, keeping with its public service mandate and public funding model. Sky News framed issues largely negatively, in line with the literature regarding the profit maximization behavior of corporately funded media organizations. RT UK, unique among the three analyzed organizations produced content wherein issues were universally negatively framed, with a particularly negative framing of the US-UK

relations and Nazism. This was tied to anti-Americanism and anti-fascism, two issues that feature prominently in Russian political discourse (Umland, 2012).

These findings contribute to the existing literature on the organizational variables level of Shoemaker, and Reese's hierarchy of influences model (2014). The results agree with prior studies such as Newton's 2016 summary that public service broadcasters produce content that is more politically neutral, and consists of more "hard" news, while commercial broadcasters produce content that contains more bias and a larger amount of "soft" news. Additional political communications studies have concluded that public service news producers create content that is strictly in line with professional journalistic practices of neutralness, while commercial producers produce content which is more entertaining (Roca-Cuberes, 2014). This study further confirms these findings, as the BBC constructed an agenda that included considerably more practical considerations for British voters and framed these issues neutrally, while Sky News constructed an agenda with higher salience placed upon "soft" issues such as sports and celebrities, and framed these issues more negatively.

In addition, this study has explored the idea of where the new expeditionary media organizations might fit in our understanding of media organizations. RT UK used the greatest range of emotive language in its coverage, although that tone was universally negative. RT UK's coverage was by far the most negative, demonstrating that it is not subject to the same organizational constraints that Sky News and the BBC are. Despite claims of editorial independence, and operations within the UK, RT UK still developed content that mirrors views and opinions presented by the Russian government.

This research could be beneficial to those bodies that regulate and legislate media policy. The balance of promoting a pluralist media environment, while providing quality information has been approached from various angles. While some states, such as Canada and Greece heavily regulate the foreign ownership of media, others, such as Ireland, Germany, and The Netherlands have completely deregulated foreign ownership (Collins, 2003). However, this research demonstrates that ownership alone does not tell the complete story. Expeditionary media organizations offer yet another model of media ownership, that regulators need to deal with. RT UK's coverage of the Brexit campaign demonstrates this. The agenda constructed by this organization appears to have been

influenced by the same higher order influences that also influenced the traditional media organizations. Despite this, the ways which those issues were framed fell very much in line with the interests of the Russian state. RT UK's framing did not mirror either the model public service broadcaster, the BBC, nor the commercial broadcaster, Sky News. Therefore, media regulators would benefit from considering the funding model of media organizations in addition to ownership.

This research also contributes to those voices that promote the merits of maintaining public service media organizations. When public revenues rapidly declined following the 2008 economic crisis, in addition to the increasing availability of information freely accessible on the internet, many governments questioned the value of maintaining state funded public service broadcasters (Mitu, 2015; Njegovan, & Sidanin, 2014). This research finds that public service news production still offers an important service to democratic societies. The neutral and balanced coverage of the BBC consisted of more detailed policy issues, which would be beneficial to political debate. Therefore, these findings support those who promote the value offered by public service media organizations such as Newton (2016).

RT UK is perhaps an outlier in the world of expeditionary media outlets in the UK's media system, due to the existing strain on British-Russian relations (Financial Times, 2017). Of specific concern is the belief from the Russian side that they are currently engaging in an "information war" with the West (Samadashvili, 2015). Therefore, further research should be undertaken to understand how agenda building and frame building is conducted by expeditionary media organizations from other countries, and whether any observable patterns exist.

Another question regarding expeditionary media arises from the findings of RT UK's agenda construction. Since the majority of issue salience in RT UK's coverage aligned with the coverage in the traditional media organizations, there appears to be some amount of British influence on RT UK's agenda construction. Therefore, it would be interesting to discover how similar the content of expeditionary media organizations matches the content of media produced in the organization's home country.

A final avenue for future research regarding expeditionary media organizations would be to determine whether and how they construct agendas and frames in different markets. For example, Al Jazeera has a global spread of organizations including Al

Jazeera Balkans, headquartered in Sarajevo; Al Jazeera Türk, headquartered in Istanbul; and formerly Al Jazeera America, in New York City. Likewise, in addition to RT UK, the RT network includes RT America, based in Washington, D.C.; RT Français, based in Paris; and RT Deutsch, headquartered in Berlin. By comparing the content produced in these varied markets, one could potentially better understand how influential funding model is to content production, as opposed to institutional and social system variables.

Recent concerns spurred by “fake news”, information warfare, and “alternative facts,” are well founded given the power of the media to influence public opinion and political agendas as demonstrated through the theories of agenda setting and framing. Therefore, it behooves those interested in the democratic process to understand what influences the media to produce the content which they do. In developing their hierarchy of influences theory Shoemaker and Reese were clear that no single level of influences existed in a vacuum, and that all levels are in some way responsible for the media content that is ultimately consumed by the public. This research helps to understand how organization funding models play a role in the construction of media agendas and frames. Just as Shoemaker and Reese proposed, my findings conclude that organizational funding does not single handedly drive content creation, but it does play a role, and should be considered when legislating, regulating, or even discussing media.

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*Appendix 1: Coding Frame*

Agriculture	Far Right	Putin
British Identity	Federal Europe	Racism
British-French Relations	Fisheries	Religion
British-Irish Relations	Future Generations	Research
Class Division	Germany	Russia
Coalition Building	Gibraltar	Science
Conservative Party Leadership	Health	Scottish Independence
Corporate Control	Horserace	Second Referendum
Economy	Influence	Security
Education	Irish Reunification	Sovereignty
Environment	Irrevocability	Sport
EU Collapse	London Independence	Swedish-UK Relations
EU Expansion	Mechanics of Leaving	Trade
EU Foreign Policy	Migration	Transport
EU Funds	Nationalism	Turkish EU Membership
EU Privacy Law	NATO	UK Rebate
EU Reform	Nazism	Uncertainty
EU Regulation	Negotiations	US-French Relations
European Citizenship	Neoliberalism	US-UK Relations
European Values	NI Peace Process	Voter Engagement
EU-Russia Relations	Northern Ireland	Wales
EU-US Relations	Populism	Women's Rights
Extremism	Privacy	Workers' Rights

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